

# African Bird Club

22.03.2003



Bulletin of the African Bird Club

Vol 10 No 1 March 2003

Birds of Niaouli  
forest, Benin

New records of the  
São Tomé Grosbeak

Diversity of food of  
the Grey Parrot in  
Korup National  
Park, Cameroon

Waterbird  
monitoring and  
birdwatcher  
training in Djibouti

Is Dja River Warbler  
really globally  
threatened?

The jizz and calls of  
doves in the Sahel

Highland grassland  
endemics in Mau  
Narok/Molo IBA,  
Kenya





# African Bird Club

## The African Bird Club aims to:

- provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology
- encourage an interest in the conservation of the birds of the region
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- publish a twice-yearly colour bulletin
- encourage observers to visit lesser known areas of the region
- encourage observers to actively search for globally threatened and near-threatened species
- run the ABC Conservation Programme

Registered Charity No 1053920

ABC particularly wishes to thank its Corporate Sponsors for their invaluable financial support in 2003: Avifauna, Birdquest, Naturetrek, Safariwise Namibia, Sunbird, Wildwings and Zeiss.

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## Membership of the ABC

Membership of the ABC is open to all and costs, per annum, UK£15 *Individual (Africa & Europe)*, UK£17 *Individual (Rest of the World)*, UK£18 *Family (Africa & Europe)*, UK£20 *Family (Rest of the World)*, UK£8 *Student (Africa & Europe)*, UK£10 *Student (Rest of the World)*, UK£25 *Libraries/Institutions*, UK£25 minimum *Supporting Member*, or UK£300 *Life Member*. To join or for further details please write to the membership secretary at the club address below.

## ABC Web site

<http://www.africanbirdclub.org>

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## Contact ABC

African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA.

email: [info@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:info@africanbirdclub.org)

Further information can be obtained directly from individual council members. Please use the following email addresses or contact them via the club's postal address. With email, replace @... with [@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:@africanbirdclub.org), e.g. [chairman@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:chairman@africanbirdclub.org) will reach the Chairman

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## The Bulletin of the African Bird Club

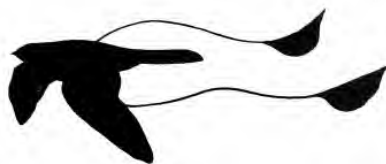
The *Bulletin of the ABC* provides a forum for news, letters, notices, recent publications, expedition results, reviews and interim publication of studies on African birds by contributors from throughout the world. Publication of results in the *Bulletin of the ABC* does not preclude publication of final results as journal papers either by the ABC or elsewhere. No

material should, however, be submitted simultaneously to the *Bulletin of the ABC* and to any other publication.

Brief notes for contributors appear elsewhere in this bulletin and further details are available from the editor ([editor@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:editor@africanbirdclub.org)).

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*Mark Andrews, Nik Borrow/Birdquest,  
Craig Robson*

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Ronald Messemaker, Kariuki  
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Scalabre, Adrian Skerrett, Jugal Tiwari,  
S.A. Tamungang, Geoff & Hilary  
Welch*

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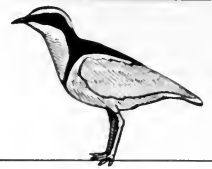
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## Front cover plate

*Buff-shouldered Widowbird* *Euplectes psammocromius*  
*by Martin Woodcock*

# Club News



## British Birdwatching Fair 2002

Thanks to sponsorship from Zeiss, ABC was again able to mount a double stand at the British Birdwatching Fair, at Rutland Water, UK, and thus maintain its profile. Without Zeiss' generous and much-appreciated support this may not have been possible. Special thanks also to Duncan Macdonald and WildSounds for the £1,000-cheque they most generously donated to the Club during the Fair. The competitors in the 'Bird Brain of Britain' were, for the first time, representatives of the four regional bird clubs, ABC, Neotropical Bird Club, Oriental Bird Club and Ornithological Society of the Middle East, and we congratulate Callan Cohen, who represented ABC, as runner-up and on being the only contestant to choose a specialist round on birds of his own club's region! Council thanks all members who visited the stand to collect their copies of the Bulletin, which enables a significant saving on postage and helps to defray the cost of the stand. Thanks also to those who helped boost the Club's funds by purchasing goods or raffle tickets, or by signing Gift Aid Declarations while at the Fair. We look forward to seeing a large number of members at Rutland on 15–17 August 2003, especially as the subject of the fair lies within the Afrotropical region—Madagascar.

*Toby Tebbitt*

## Updates to the Bird Recorders list

In *Bull. ABC* 9: 58–60, Keith Betton provided an updated list of Bird Recorders and Checklist Compilers for the ABC region. Since then, a number of changes have been drawn to the Club's attention and these are presented below.

### Central African Republic (new postal address)

R. J. Dowsett, Le Pouget, Sumène F-30440, France.

### Mauritania (new recorder)

Otto Overdijk, Knuppeldam 4, 9166 NZ Schiermonnikoog, Netherlands. E-mail: o.overdijk@wxs.nl.

### The Gambia (new recorder)

Lamin Jobarteh, West African Bird Study Association, Palm Grove Hotel, Banjul, The Gambia. E-mail: laminjobarteh2002@yahoo.co.uk.

### Tunisia (new email)

Hichem Azafzaf. E-mail: azafzaf@gnet.tn.

## ABC sales items

The following items are currently available for sale from ABC. All proceeds from sales are used to promote the aims of the Club, UK registered charity 1053920.

1. ABC Sweatshirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African Bird Club Working for Birds in Africa', black, navy or bottle green. Sizes: medium, large, extra large and extra-extra large: UK£20.
2. New-style ABC Polo shirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African Bird Club Working for Birds in Africa', bottle green, navy blue and black. Sizes: large, extra-large and extra-extra large: UK£13.50.
3. New ABC T-shirt featuring Bush Shrikes by Dave Nurney, grey. Sizes: large, extra-large and extra-extra large: UK£13.50.
4. ABC T-shirt featuring Turacos by Mark Andrews, white. Sizes: extra large: UK£9.
5. ABC caps featuring an embroidered ABC logo, black, bottle green, red and maroon: UK£7.
6. ABC bone-china mugs: two designs featuring Carmine Bee-eater or Golden-breasted Starlings by Martin Woodcock: UK£6 or UK£10 a pair.
7. ABC badge featuring Egyptian Plover design: UK£2.
8. White-winged Alalis A4 colour print by Nik Borrow from *Bull. ABC* 2 (2): signed and numbered limited edition of 50 at UK£7.50; also available unsigned at UK£1.00.
9. Nightjar A4 colour prints by Martin Woodcock from *Bull. ABC* 2.2: one print illustrates Mountain and Rwenzori Nightjars, the second depicts Black-shouldered and Fiery-necked Nightjars: UK£1.50 for the pair.
10. Locally designed cards on hand-made paper, produced by the paper-making co-operative of the BirdLife International-supported Kilum Mountain Forest Project in Cameroon. A selection of five cards in a hand-woven wallet: UK£5.
11. *Bull. ABC*, volume 1, 1994, number 1 and 2: UK£5 each.
12. *Bull. ABC*, volume 2, 1995, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
13. *Bull. ABC*, volume 3, 1996, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
14. *Bull. ABC*, volume 4, 1997, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
15. *Bull. ABC*, volume 5, 1998, number 2 only: UK£7 each.
16. *Bull. ABC*, volume 6, 1999, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
17. *Bull. ABC*, volume 7, 2000, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
18. *Bull. ABC*, volume 8, 2001, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
19. *Bull. ABC*, volume 9, 2002, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
20. Azores Trip Report, Sep–Oct 1997 by Willem Steenge and Theo Bakker, 29 pp covering travel, transport, weather, ferry timetables and fares, itinerary and site guides, many maps: UK£5.
21. Birds in the Gaborone Area, Botswana by S J Tyler and W D Borello, 100 pp with detailed species information concerning status and sites where they can be seen, with detailed information on some sites and coordinates for all sites: UK£10.
22. Cameroon Trip Report, Dec 1994–Jan 1995 by Richard Webb, 72 pp with sections covering travel, health, weather, references, a detailed itinerary, systematic checklist of 481 species and a 29-pp site guide including 25 maps: UK£6.
23. Cameroon Trip Report, Mar–Apr 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle, 22 pp, useful update to previous report, following similar route, with logistics, sites, itinerary and systematic list of 551 species seen: UK£4.
24. Cape Verde Trip Report, Mar 1996 by Theo Bakker and Klaas van Dijk, 37 pp, details and locations of all 61 species seen over 4 weeks, with useful information on travel and accommodation, and many detailed maps and photographs: UK£6.50.
25. Ethiopia Trip Report, Dec 1995–Jan 1996 by Richard Webb, sections covering travel, health, weather, references, a detailed itinerary, systematic checklist of 478 species and

- site guide for 30 locations: UK£7.50.
26. Ethiopia Trip Report, Oct–Nov 1996 by Jon Hornbuckle, 31 pp, complement to previous report, with logistics, sites, itinerary and systematic list of species seen, including 30 endemics: UK£4.
  27. *Ethiopia: in search of endemic birds*, Sep–Oct 1997 by Julian Francis and Hadoram Shirihai, 45 pp, 47 excellent colour photographs including endemics, with logistics, travel tips, detailed itinerary and systematic list of species seen, including identification notes for Degodi and Sidamo Larks: UK£10.
  28. Ethiopia/Eritrea Trip Report, Mar–May 1998 by David Murdoch, 280 species seen, short but useful update to our other Ethiopia reports, itinerary and systematic list of all birds and mammals seen, also details of sites in Eritrea: UK£3.
  29. The Gambia, 10–17 Sep 1999 by Stuart Sharp, 34 pp including sections on travel/holiday tips, itinerary, brief site descriptions and systematic lists of birds and mammals seen: UK£5.
  30. The Gambia, 1–8 Nov 1998 by Gruff Dodd, 26 pp cover trip planning, very detailed itinerary and systematic list of 180 species seen: UK£4.
  31. *Birds of Senegambia*, checklist: UK£0.50.
  32. Birding Ghana, Feb 1996 by Mindy and Sherif El Din, 39 pp contain sections on orientation, itinerary, some site descriptions, a table of species seen each day, plus extra notes on birding hints and etiquette in Ghana, with more site suggestions: UK£6.50.
  33. Ghana Trip Report, Jan–Feb 1997 by Simon Plat, 35 pp complement Birding Ghana report, especially for travel by public transport; with checklist of 220 species, detailed itinerary, and site guides, including coast between Accra and Takoradi, Kakum National Park, Subri Forest Reserve, Kumasi, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa and Mole National Park: UK£4.
  34. Côte d'Ivoire by public transport trip report, Jan–Feb 1995 by Eddie Williams, 28 pp with several maps, 412 species plus extensive mammal list, local information, itinerary and site guides: UK£4.
  35. Kenya Trip Report, Feb–Mar 1995 by Mike Hunter and Graham Speight, 90 pp with sections covering travel, health, climate, accommodation, references, a detailed itinerary, systematic list of 693 species, and a 50-pp site guide covering 48 sites and 28 maps: UK£8.
  36. *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Nairobi*, including Nairobi National Park, by Bill Harvey, 32 pp providing a checklist and details of status, frequency, habitat preferences and frequency in Nairobi National Park and Nairobi Arboretum: UK£0.50.
  37. Madagascar and the Comores, Oct–Nov 1995 by Jon Hornbuckle, 'How to see all the birds without a hire car', 34 pp list 186 species in Madagascar including 124 endemics, 79 species in the Comores including 17 endemics, with logistics, itinerary, site notes, one map, systematic list of birds and mammals: UK£4.
  38. Madagascar, Nov–Dec 1997 by Chris Bell, Mike Hunter, Dawn Ross and Malcolm Roxby, useful update to previous reports on how to find recently re-/discovered species, with full species list including 123 Malagasy endemics, itinerary, brief site guide: UK£4.
  39. Madagascar (with Mauritius and Réunion), winter 1997–98 by Brian Gee, 67 pp, 21 maps, 192 species seen in Madagascar, with logistics (including getting around on public transport), site guides (including Montagne d'Ambre, Tsiribihina River, Kirindy Forest), systematic list, advice on guides etc: UK£9.
  40. Madagascar Trip Report, October 1998 by Paul Noakes, 14 pp, three maps, a brief report covering over 90% of the endemics: UK£2.50.
  41. Malaŵi, March 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle, 17 pp, logistics, sites, seven maps, itinerary and systematic list of 306 species seen: UK£3.
  42. Malaŵi and the Luangwa Valley (Zambia), Jul–Aug 1997 by Henk Hendriks, 45 pp, 14 maps, with logistics, site guides, complete systematic list of 370 species, and where to see rare and difficult species: UK£8.
  43. Southern Malaŵi and Luangwa Valley (Zambia), Jan 1999 by Nigel Wheatley, includes maps of major towns and sites, maps of Senga Bay and Zomba, sites visited, other sites, systematic list of birds and mammals: UK£7.50.
  44. Namibia and the Cape, Nov 1994 by Jon Hornbuckle, 43 pp, logistics, site notes, one map, detailed itinerary and systematic list of species seen: UK£4.
  45. Birding Senegal, 10–29 Nov 1998 by Mindy and Sherif Baha el Din, 26 pp, one map, details of travel, accommodation, detailed itinerary, key habitats and sites, and systematic lists of 282 bird species and mammals: UK£5.
  46. KwaZulu-Natal and Transvaal, South Africa, 8–21 Oct 2000 by Mike Hunter, 13 pp covering daily itinerary, brief notes for each site and comprehensive list of 327 species: UK£3.
  47. Cape Town to The Richtersveld, South Africa, 4–19 May 2001 by Paul Gascoigne and Helen Pooley, 29 pp covering detailed daily itinerary, accommodation information and comprehensive list of 168 species: UK£4.
  48. Western Cape and Namibia, Nov 1999–Jan 2000 by Brian Gee, 69 pp covering good general information, detailed site guide with maps and comprehensive species list: UK£9.
  49. Cape Province, South Africa, Feb–Mar 1999 by Gruff Dodd, 42 pp covering trip planning, very detailed itinerary and systematic list of 239 species: UK£6.
  50. Eastern South Africa and Zimbabwe, Feb–Mar 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle, 35 pp, logistics, site notes, five maps, detailed itinerary including Wakkerstroom, Mkuzi, Umlalazi, Sani Pass, Hwange and Victoria Falls, with systematic list of 529 species: UK£5.
  51. Voyage Naturaliste au Cape Provinces d'Afrique du Sud, Sep–Oct 1997 par Georges et Mireille Oliosio, 50 pp en Français: renseignements pratiques, documentation, itinéraire et principaux sites visités. Liste commentée des 246 espèces d'oiseaux vus, aussi mammifères et reptiles, plans des plusieurs sites; also includes an 11-pp itinerary plus checklist of the 246 birds and 33 mammals in English: UK£6.
  52. Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, Jan–Feb 1996 by Eddie Williams, describes how to visit the prime sites using only public transport, 24 pp, with detailed orientation information, site guides, nine maps and a systematic species list: UK£4.50.
  53. Uganda Trip Report, Jun–Aug 1995 by Henk Hendriks, 59 pp, sections covering orientation, references, itinerary, systematic checklist of 473 bird and 36 mammal species, and a detailed site guide with ten maps: UK£6.50.
  54. *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda*, by Jonathan Rossouw and Marco Sacchi, 110 pp with a section covering general

birding in Uganda, 15 main sites are covered with a map and sections on birding, other wildlife, access, facilities and nearby sites; also a systematic checklist covering status at each site: UK£7.50.

55. *Wakkerstroom Bird and Nature Guide* by Warwick and Michele Tarboton, second edn, Mar 1998, detailed description of this fascinating area on border of Mpumalanga (Eastern Transvaal) and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and what can be seen there, many illustrations: UK£5.
56. Zimbabwe (including parts of Botswana and South Africa), 18 Feb-5

Mar 2000 by Gruff Dodd, detailed account of trip and systematic list covering 382 species: UK£6.

57. *Birdwatch Zimbabwe*, 1991, by Derek Solomon and Jacko Williams, comprehensive guide with detailed descriptions of all main areas with maps, site guides, accommodation directions, checklist and many line drawings: UK£8.50.

Postage and packing: please send UK£2 for each UK order, and UK£3 for each overseas surface mail order. For overseas airmail please add UK£1.50 for each item ordered.

Orders: payments should be made in pounds sterling by cheque/postal order

(payable to African Bird Club) or credit card. Full credit card details are required, please specify Visa, Access, Mastercard or Eurocard; card number; cardholder's name (as it appears on card); cardholder's address; expiry date; cardholder's signature; and amount payable. Please be sure to specify your name and address and the full details of your order including quantity, with size and colour where applicable.

Please send your order to African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Enquiries may also be sent to ABC Sales Officer, Moira Hargreaves at the Club's address or e-mail: [sales@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:sales@africanbirdclub.org).

### Stuart Keith

Council has just learned with great sadness of the death of Stuart Keith. He was one of the editors, and a major contributor, to *The Birds of Africa*. An obituary will follow in a later edition of the Bulletin.

## Travel agency

Flights....Car Hire....Accommodation & Ground Arrangements..... Insurance.....

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# Africa Round-up



## General

### BirdLife International's reaction to the Johannesburg World Summit

As the vast majority of readers will be aware, last August–September was marked by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg, South Africa, ten years after the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In addition to many of the world's heads of state, the WSSD was also attended by a number of organisations from within the BirdLife partnership. A statement from BirdLife International issued at the close of the summit makes interesting but unfortunately far from positive reading. It is quoted here in full.

‘The planet can only be sustainable if its ecosystems work. Without a healthy environment, the quality of life of people around the world is seriously undermined.

Members of governments, civil society and business leaders came together in Johannesburg to produce a plan of action for reversing global environmental degradation and poverty. In spite of the efforts of some countries to achieve this, the Johannesburg commitment is even less action-oriented than the outcome of Rio ten years ago. Since Rio, environmental degradation, especially climate change and biodiversity loss, has continued unabated. Some small steps in the right direction have been made in Johannesburg but it would be seriously misguided for world leaders or anyone else to suggest that this is enough. The summit has not shown sufficient commitment to the people of the world to make real changes to the quality of their lives, especially in developing countries.

This is why BirdLife International, a global alliance of conservation NGOs with 99 Partner organisations around the world, is calling for further action resulting from the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. We call upon like-minded governments who want a more robust plan of action to commit to a tighter set of targets and timetables for real change. We suggest that these countries show leadership in the struggle to provide a better environment for current and future generations. Specifically, we call for:

- a commitment to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The intention to

‘significantly reduce’ biodiversity loss is simply not enough.

- adoption of the ecosystems approach and the precautionary principle in social, economic and environmental policy making, including in the areas of natural resource management and trade.
- increased spending on biodiversity conservation programmes by the governments of the world, without delay.
- the development, through the United Nations, of an open and consultative plan of action, using the WEHAB papers on water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity as a basis.
- adoption of a set of measurable indicators by governments to monitor national and international progress towards sustainable development.

While voluntary (Type II) partnerships are welcomed, they are clearly not enough to halt environmental degradation and the advance of poverty around the world. The alleviation of poverty depends on the sustainable use of natural resources. The nations of the world must make stronger commitments which governments, civil society and the private sector can take forward to make a real difference before it is too late.’

Source: [http://www.birdlife.org.za/news/news\\_front.cfm?ipkNewsID=360](http://www.birdlife.org.za/news/news_front.cfm?ipkNewsID=360)

### Are African droughts triggered by Western pollution?

Emissions from power stations and factories in North America and Europe have perhaps sparked the severe droughts which have afflicted the Sahel region of Africa. The cause appears to be the clouds of sulphur belched out alongside the soot, organic carbon, ammonia and nitrate produced when fossil fuels are burnt, according to researchers in Australia and Canada. As these compounds move through the atmosphere, they create aerosols that affect cloud formation, altering the temperature of the Earth's surface and leading to dramatic shifts in regional weather patterns. In the past 30–40 years, the Sahel has suffered the most sustained drought seen in any part of the world since records began, with precipitation falling by between 20% and 50%. Although the droughts have had

climate experts puzzled, the impacts have been obvious. During the worst years, in 1972–1975, and 1984–1985, up to one million people starved to death. Leon Rotsteyn of Australia's national research agency, and his colleague, Ulrike Lohmann, of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, ran a simulation of global climate that included interactions between sulphur dioxide emissions and cloud formation. Sulphur dioxide creates sulphate aerosols that provide condensation nuclei for clouds. With more nuclei, clouds form from smaller droplets than usual, and are more efficient at reflecting solar radiation, cooling the Earth below. When they included the huge sulphur emissions from the Northern Hemisphere during the 1980s in their model, the Earth's surface in the north cooled relative to the south, driving the tropical rain belt south and causing droughts in the Sahel. Their results will be reported soon in the *Journal of Climate*. During the past few years, the droughts have become less severe, a change that Rotsteyn puts down to the ‘clean air’ laws in North America and Europe that reduced sulphur dioxide emissions in response to another environmental crisis, acid rain. But problems in Asia may be just beginning. Climate researchers around the world are beginning to study other types of aerosols, such as the clouds of black soot and sulphate being churned out by rapidly industrializing India and China, in the hope that they may shed light on other regional weather anomalies.

Source: <http://www.newscientist.com/news/print.jsp?id=ns99992393>

### Grants for African ecologists

The British Ecological Society (BES) Overseas Bursaries scheme provides grants for ecologists in developing countries for innovative ecological research. It aims to encourage links between ecologists in developing countries with those in the UK and other European countries. In 2002 and 2003 the grants are being restricted to citizens of Africa but consideration will be given to extending the scheme to other developing countries in 2004. Each grant is worth a maximum of UK£9,000 over an 18-month period and is intended for the purchase of the basic tools required to conduct a research project, limited in-country travel and part of the applicant's

salary. It cannot be used for international travel or education. Successful applicants will be linked by the BES with ecologists based in the UK or other European countries who share related research interests. Successful applicants also receive free membership of the BES and a free subscription to one of its journals for the duration of the project. Applications must be made on the BES application form. The form includes detailed guidelines on the application process and how to complete the form. Copies are available from the Society's office in the UK. Please note that the application form will shortly be available in French and applications in French as well as in English are accepted. Applications will be judged by a panel of assessors on the basis of the applicant's personal qualifications, the scientific quality, novelty and feasibility of the proposal, and the relevance of the planned research results. Successful applicants may also apply for a BES Overseas Fellowship that funds further research work, the applicant's salary and international travel.

Funding is for innovative ecological research. Examples of possible research areas include plant–animal interactions, restoration ecology, microbial ecology, ecological processes and community ecology. Specific exclusions are the transfer of already-existing technology, research solely focused on agriculture, forestry and bio-prospecting. Survey work is only considered for funding where it can be clearly demonstrated that it is required as preliminary work for a longer term research project. The proposed project can be part of an existing programme but the application should be for a clearly defined piece of research. Researchers should also question how their research will affect, or be affected by, local ecological and socio-economic conditions where the research is likely to be implemented. Applications for the 2003 grants must be received by the BES by 1 October 2003. Applicants will be advised of the outcome within two months of the deadline. Applicants must satisfy the following criteria: be a scientist and a citizen of a country in Africa or its associated islands, have at least a MSc or equivalent degree, and be working at a university or research institution (including field centres, NGOs, museums etc.) that provides basic research facilities. Further information about BES and the application forms is available at: <http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/>.

Source: Phil Atkinson in litt. to *African Birding*, August 2002

## African vultures potentially at risk by mass die-off of Asian vultures

Southern Asian vulture populations have suffered a catastrophic crash in the past decade. Indian *Gyps* vultures, once considered common, have declined by more than 90% and are now listed as Critically Endangered. More than 100,000 have died. An ongoing multi-national effort to identify and address the cause of the crisis has not yet succeeded in stemming the tide of deaths. Results from post-mortem examinations have shown that many birds died from kidney failure, associated with an avian form of gout. Research supports the hypothesis of a lethal viral infection. As numbers of the highly migratory Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* have also been found dead or sick, there is a risk that the disease will be introduced into Africa. Indeed, many Eurasian Griffons winter in North Africa and there is a continuous flow of *Gyps* species from North Africa to the south of the continent. Thus all African vultures may eventually be threatened. For now, the focus in Africa should be on monitoring populations and collecting data on healthy birds. For more information, visit [www.vulturedeclines.org](http://www.vulturedeclines.org).

Sources: World Birdwatch 24 (1), pp 14–15; Africa—Birds & Birding 7 (5), pp 50–53

## Relationships among *Criniger* bulbuls

Recent analysis of DNA fragments from 27 bulbul species, belonging to eight African and Asiatic genera, found that African and Asian *Criniger* are not closely related. A potentially interesting result for the Afrotropical region, upon which the researchers have not commented, is that White-bearded Greenbul *Criniger ndussumensis* and Yellow-bearded Greenbul *C. olivaceus* do not appear as each other's nearest relative, the latter being apparently most closely related to Red-tailed Greenbul *C. calurus*. (The paper can be viewed at [www.mnhn.fr/publication/zoosyst/z01n4a12.html](http://www.mnhn.fr/publication/zoosyst/z01n4a12.html)).

Source: Zoosystema 23, pp 857–863



White-bearded Greenbul *Criniger ndussumensis* by Mark Andrews

## Developments in *Saxicola* taxonomy

Recently published data concerning the evolutionary relationships among stonechats *Saxicola* spp suggest that the Common Stonechat *S. torquata* complex comprises five species-level taxa. Using mitochondrial DNA and genomic fingerprinting techniques, the German team headed by Michael Wink discovered that each of the taxa represented separate evolutionary lineages, which have been distinct for at least one million years, and that gene flow and hybridisation between taxa are minimal. Given differences in morphology, breeding biology, vocalisations and physiological control of their annual cycles, the authors of the study recommend that henceforth *S. torquata* be treated as five 'species', of which three, African Stonechat *S. [t.] torquata*, Réunion Stonechat *S. [t.] tectes* and Canary Islands Stonechat *S. [t.] dactyloides*, are endemic to the region covered by the ABC.

Source: Br. Birds 95, pp 349–355

## Origin of sunbirds debated

A study using DNA sequence data to examine relationships among 70% of the world's sunbirds, carried out by South Africa's Percy FitzPatrick Institute PhD student Rauri Bowie, suggests that the true sunbirds originated in Asia. The high species diversity of the African sunbirds probably resulted from an explosive radiation following colonisation from Asia. This goes against the supposition that African birds are the most ancient members of the family, as argued by Michael Irwin when he recently revised the classification of African sunbirds (1999, *Honeyguide* 45: 45–58).

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 7 (2), p 19

## Do Long-tailed and Yellow-billed Shrikes belong to the same genus?

Among the usual mix of papers and articles in the latest issue of *Honeyguide*, the journal of BirdLife Zimbabwe, is a contribution by Lew Grimes which, through an analysis of demographic, breeding and other data, questions whether the application of separate genera for Long-tailed *Urolestes melanoleucus* and Yellow-billed Shrikes *Corvinella corvina* (as in *Birds of Africa*) is justified, and whether the two might not be better considered congeneric within *Corvinella*. Grimes is unable to reach any conclusions for now, but clearly this is an issue that demands further attention.

Source: *Honeyguide* 48, pp 97–100



## A. & C. Black consolidates leading position

Publisher A. & C. Black, well-known in ornithological circles for its high-quality series of bird identification guides and monographs, recently announced its acquisition of the prestigious bird and natural history lists of T. & A. D. Poyser and Academic Press Natural World from Elsevier Science, a sale which reflects Elsevier's desire to concentrate on their core area of academic publishing. The backlist consists of around 70 titles in print and includes no fewer than seven previous winners of the Best Bird Book of the Year awarded by the journal *British Birds*, two winners of the *Birdwatch* Bird Book of the Year, and three titles short-listed for the prestigious BP Natural World Book Prize. A strong forward programme has also been acquired, including the final volume of *Birds of Africa* (due in 2004) and a companion tome, *The Birds of Madagascar*, together with the Poyser imprint. Higher level titles such as species monographs will continue to be published under the T. & A. D. Poyser name, while others will become Helm titles. The lists will be integrated into the Christopher Helm Ornithology division of A. & C. Black under the control of its commissioning editor, Nigel Redman.

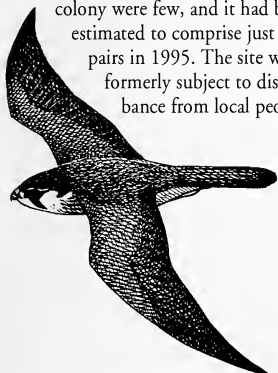
Source: A. & C. Black press release,  
July 2002

## North Africa & North Atlantic islands

### Eleonora's Falcons on the up

Recent surveys of Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* in the Essaouira archipelago, Morocco, in 2000 and 2001 recorded a total population of 675 breeding pairs, c10% of the global population, making the site perhaps the most important in the world. Previous data on the Essaouira

colony were few, and it had been estimated to comprise just 233 pairs in 1995. The site was formerly subject to disturbance from local people



Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*  
by Craig Robson

collecting nestlings for food and from collectors, but the Moroccan authorities have implemented protection measures, clearly to the benefit of the species.

Source: World Birdwatch 24 (2), p 9

### Great Bustards in Morocco

Surveys of the Moroccan population of the globally threatened Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, undertaken in 1998–2001, found up to c90 birds. Population size for spring was estimated at 92–111 individuals, and 117–133 for winter. Breeding was confirmed. The birds are threatened by illegal hunting, habitat loss through agricultural intensification, road building, disturbance, and accidents at powerlines and antennas.

Source: Bird Conserv. Intern. 12, p 19–33

### Unusual nest site of Ruddy Shelduck in southern Tunisia

During an expedition of the 'Groupe Tunisien d'Ornithologie' in April 2001, a pair of Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* with seven ducklings was found on an artificial lake south of Kébili, in the central southern Tunisian desert. Recent surveys have confirmed the importance of small waterbodies in the Kébili region for this species and 60–80 individuals are observed in the area throughout the year. Breeding of 1–3 pairs in wetlands near oases was confirmed in 1995, 1996 and 1999. It is suggested that the exploration of remote desert areas where artesian wells have been drilled could reveal more breeding Ruddy Shelduck.

Source: Alauda 70, pp 422–424

### Roseate Terns of same colony winter on different continents

Recent research on Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* in the Azores has established that birds breeding there may either winter in West Africa, with terns from northern Europe, or off the South American coast, with terns from north-eastern America. More work is required to determine the extent of the movements of this globally threatened species and its dependency on different wintering grounds on both sides of the Atlantic.

Source: J. Field Orn. 73, pp 180–184

### Birds from North Atlantic islands on website

Interesting images of birds photographed and videoed on the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and the Cape Verdes, including endemics and vagrants, can be found on the Cursorius website, <http://www.cursorius.com>.

Source: Leo Boon in litt. to *Megabirds*,  
October 2002



White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* by Nik Borrow  
(courtesy of Birdquest)

## West Africa

### New BirdLife project in Upper Guinea forests

BirdLife International has secured US\$650,000 from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (a joint World Bank, GEF, Conservation International and MacArthur Foundation finance mechanism) for a new project in the Upper Guinea forests of West Africa. The three-year 'Building Capacity for Biodiversity Conservation in Africa' project will capitalise upon Important Bird Areas (IBA) conservation work undertaken by the Ghana Wildlife Society and Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, and will also establish national IBA programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. The Upper Guinea forest, which stretches from Guinea to Ghana, is within an Endemic Bird Area and is a Conservation International Biodiversity Hotspot. There are 87 IBAs in the region, hosting 240–250 forest-dependent species, of which more than 25 are threatened, restricted-range or rare, including Gola Malimbe *Malimbus ballmanni*, White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* and White-breasted Guineafowl *Agelastes meleagrides*.

Source: World Birdwatch 24 (2), p 8

### Subantarctic Skua off West African coasts?

DNA analysis of feathers of two skuas, found in Great Britain in October 2001 and February 2002, suggest that both were Subantarctic (=Brown) Skuas *Catharacta antarctica*, a species that had never been recorded with certainty in the North Atlantic. It is a circumpolar breeder on subantarctic islands and the Antarctic Peninsula, with non-breeders dispersing throughout the Southern Ocean. It occurs year-round off Africa's southern coasts, north to south Angola and south Mozambique, and vagrants have been recorded north to Kenya, Somalia and Oman. The sensational and unexpected British records raise the question whether this species may also be found further

north along Africa's western coasts, notably off Senegal.

Source: Br. Birds 95, p 538; Birding World 15, pp 383–389

### Spotted Sandpiper in Senegal documented

The first record of Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* in Senegal (cf. *Bull ABC* 8: 152), has now been documented. This American vagrant was observed on 20 February 2001 on the island of Gorée and represents the third for sub-Saharan mainland Africa, following those in Kenya, in September 1999, and Cameroon, in April 2000 (cf. *Bull ABC* 8: 48–50).

Source: Dutch Birding 24, pp 156–157

### Birding in Burkina Faso

A recent issue of *Dutch Birding* contains an introduction to birding in the land-locked, little-visited but obviously highly interesting state of Burkina Faso. The article is liberally illustrated with excellent full-colour photographs by the first author, Bruno Portier. *Dutch Birding* is available on subscription at EUR36 for countries outside Europe (EUR33 for European countries outside The Netherlands) from Jeannette Admiraal, Iepenlaan 11, 1901 ST Castricum, The Netherlands. Credit-card payments are accepted.

Source: Dutch Birding 24, pp 127–141

### Gabon announces creation of national parks

An unprecedented 10% of Gabon's landmass will be set aside as national parks, according to an announcement made by the national government in September 2002. Some 13 national parks, comprising more than 26,000 km<sup>2</sup> will be established and many of them will be developed for ecotourism, as an economic alternative to exploiting Gabon's extensive forests for timber. Gabon, which previously had no national park system, has been working closely with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) on conservation issues for the past ten years. Funding has been promised by the US government, WCS, World Wide Fund for Nature and Conservation International, which has announced a US\$72.5-million commitment to protect forests in the Congo Basin, which includes Gabon.

Source: www.gabonnationalparks.com

## East Africa

### Hybrid turacos in Ethiopia

A recent paper in *Alauda* documents the occurrence of hybrids between nominate White-cheeked Turaco *Tauraco leucotis* and

Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *T. ruspolii* in southern Ethiopia. The latter is globally threatened: should the hybrids be fertile, this may have implications for the species' conservation. The authors suggest that habitat degradation and fragmentation may be the cause of the hybridisation of these two species, which are normally ecologically separated.

Source: *Alauda* 70, pp 247–251

### President Museveni calls for ban on wildlife exports

While launching the conservation endowment fund at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre, Entebbe, in June 2002, President Museveni of Uganda called for the immediate ban of the trade in wild animals, stating that the trade contravenes the Africa Growth Opportunities Act (AGOA) objectives. 'We cannot export our wild animals under AGOA, but we can exploit them through tourism', Museveni said. In a drive to ensure effective conservation of wildlife, the president donated US\$100,000 towards the conservation education trust fund.

Source: Johnnie Kamugisha, President Uganda Bird Guides Club, in litt. to *African Birding*, June 2002

### Project to conserve forests in western Uganda

A campaign to safeguard the biodiversity of the Albertine Rift has been initiated by the signing of an agreement by the Ugandan government and World Wide Fund for Nature for a project aimed at conserving forests in the west of the country. The Albertine Rift mountains are an Endemic Bird Area of urgent priority rank containing 37 restricted-range bird species. The area has also one of the highest human populations in the world, in places exceeding 1,000 people per square km, and forests are becoming increasingly fragmented as a result of encroachment and clearance for agriculture.

Source: *Swara* 24 (3), p 22

### First nest and egg records of Black-eared Ground Thrush

In September and October 1999, the nest and eggs of the poorly known Black-eared Ground Thrush *Zoothera camaronensis* were found for the first time, in Budongo Forest, western Uganda. The five nests were all situated in an area of 50 ha in pristine forest with a clear understorey and dominated by *Cynometra alexandri* trees. Nests were in a clear fork of a shrub, 1.2–3.5 m above ground, and clutches were of 2–3 eggs. The discoverer, Jeremy Lindsell, stresses the ease with which the nests were located and suggests this may provide a



Black-eared Ground Thrush *Zoothera camaronensis* by Mark Andrews

method to investigate this species' status and biology.

Source: *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.* 122, pp 196–201

### Bird guides in Uganda

Birders interested in visiting Uganda on their own can now obtain assistance from locally trained bird guides. Uganda Bird Guides Club, in conjunction with local BirdLife Partner Nature Uganda, has initiated a programme to train Ugandans as bird guides. Apart from 'site' guides, eight 'national' bird guides have already been trained. Enquiries should be addressed to Nature Uganda (eanhs@imul.com) or Uganda Bird Guides Club (ugandasbirdguides@hotmail.com).

Source: Herbert Byaruhanga in litt. to *African Birding*, June 2002

### Short-toed Snake Eagle deleted from the Kenyan list

The only Kenyan record of Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, a specimen taken near Lake Turkana in 1968, is in fact an immature (second-plumaged) Black-breasted Snake Eagle *C. pectoralis*, as demonstrated by Bill Clark and Dennis Paulson in a recent paper (Note: *Birds of Africa* considers the latter as a form of Short-toed Eagle *C. gallicus*).

Source: *Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl.* 122, pp 156–157

### Latest news from Sokoke Forest

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Kenya, has been ranked second in importance for threatened bird species among African mainland forests, and has been the subject of a long-term BirdLife International programme to conserve the forest and its wildlife, while bringing increasing benefits to local people. The area is the last sizeable remnant of East African coastal forest, which once extended from Somalia to Mozambique. Surrounded by communities of poor people, it is unsurprisingly highly threatened. In March 2002 a six-year project financed by the European Union, which has helped to establish a successful conservation system and chart a future

course, endorsed by all levels of Kenyan society from central government to local village associations, to ensure the continued survival of the forest, was completed. A *Strategic Forest Management Plan, 2002–2027* has been compiled by the local Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Management Team, which bodes well for the future of the forest.

Source: World Birdwatch 24 (2), p 7

### Tanzania Bird Atlas going strong

The Tanzania Bird Atlas now holds over 502,000 records, of which over 213,000 are non-duplicated, 21,676 are breeding season reports and 7,512 are eggs in nest records. Three squares are now known to hold over 600 species and several others have over 500. Only 26 squares lack records (for those observers wishing to break new ground) but 57 are still apparently bereft of Common Bulbuls *Pycnonotus barbatus*; this species should occur in every month in every square, indicating the work that is still to do. New maps have recently been made available for many waterbirds, in addition to wood-hoopoes, hornbills, tits and babblers. Atlas data, which include more than 300 distribution maps, are viewable at <http://home.no.net/stenil1/TZbirdatlas/tzatlas.htm>.

Source: Neil and Liz Baker in litt. to *African Birding* August 2002

### Forest loss and loss of biodiversity in the Uluguru Mountains

During surveys carried out in 1999–2001 in the Uluguru Mountains, an area with an exceptional degree of endemism in eastern Tanzania, data were gathered to document the effect of forest loss on biodiversity. Forest area has declined from c300 km<sup>2</sup> in 1955 to 230 km<sup>2</sup> in 2001, with the greatest losses having occurred at altitudes of 600–1,600 m in submontane forest. Although most of the endemic and near-endemic species known from the Uluguru were still found during the recent surveys, some were not, among which were the near-endemic Usambara Weaver *Ploceus nicolli* (Endangered) and Banded Green Sunbird *Antheptes rubriorques* (Vulnerable).

Source: Oryx 36, pp 140–152

## Indian Ocean islands

### Inter-island transfers of Seychelles White-eye

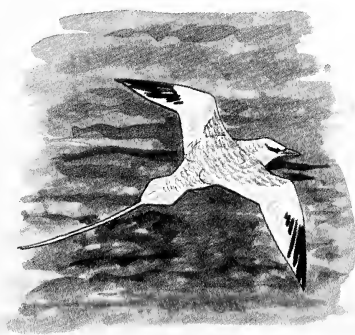
We recently reported on the Seychelles White-eye *Zosterops modestus* Recovery Programme (*Bull. ABC* 9: 8). The first inter-island transfers of the species have now been effected and have proved highly

successful: 31 adults were transferred in small groups by helicopter from Conception to Frégate, in October–November 2001, and by late April 2002 14 young had fledged. There is no evidence that the white-eye formerly occurred on Frégate, but habitat assessment based on the species' ecology demonstrated that the island could host a large population. Following the eradication of rats there in July 2000, a conservation introduction project, based on IUCN-Reintroduction Specialist Group guidelines was prepared. Birds were mist-netted on Conception, with just one bird or a pair taken per territory to maximise genetic diversity, and were transferred in bird-bags inside a special box built to reduce helicopter noise and keep the birds cool. On arrival in Frégate, birds were fed on sugared water, berries, honey and invertebrates before being released. The first nest, containing two eggs, was found in late November.

Source: World Birdwatch 24 (2), p 6

### Australia-ringed Red-tailed Tropicbird found in Seychelles

In September 2001, a Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda* was found on Réunion Island, Seychelles, by Dr Gerard Rocamora, ornithologist with the Seychelles White-eye Recovery Programme. It had been ringed as a nestling in western Australia, in January 1998. The distance between ringing and recovery sites is 5,948 km, which is the longest movement recorded for this species ringed in Australia. Red-tailed Tropicbirds breed on tropical Indian and Pacific Ocean islands, with non-breeding birds dispersing around the islands. The west Indian Ocean race *rubricauda* breeds throughout Seychelles, in Mauritius and Comores and on Nosy Ve, off south-west Madagascar, and is occasionally seen off Africa's eastern coasts, south to South Africa. This appears to be the first definite record of an Australian



Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*  
by Mark Andrews

bird for the region.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 7 (4), p 15

### Reappearance of Indian House Crows in Seychelles

BirdLife Seychelles has confirmed reports of at least two Indian House Crows *Corvus splendens* in the north of Mahé, the largest island in the Granitic Seychelles. There have also been unconfirmed reports of one in the south of the island. The Seychelles can claim to be the only country to have eradicated an introduced population of this species. Birds were first seen in 1977 and, despite some being controlled by government marksmen, the population continued to grow until about 25 were present on Mahé in the mid-1980s. Fortunately, a concerted effort eradicated the birds by the mid-1990s, with only occasional reports since. The appearance of at least two birds is a matter of concern and emphasises the need for vigilance and proactive control methods in the light of continued and presumably ship-assisted introduction.

Source: *BirdLife Seychelles* in litt. May 2002

### Seychelles Fodies with spectacular colorations discovered on D'Arros

During a visit to D'Arros (Amirantes, Seychelles) in June 2002, Dr Gérard Rocamora discovered Seychelles Fodies *Foudia sechellarum* with very peculiar and enigmatic plumage characteristics. This endemic species, considered globally threatened and classified as Vulnerable (world population c3,000) is largely confined to three rat-free granitic islands (Cousin, Cousine, and Frégate). In 1965, five from Cousin were introduced, by a Bristol University Expedition, to the coralline island of D'Arros, c300 km distant. Today, D'Arros is home to several hundred Seychelles Fodies. But while on Cousin, males in breeding plumage only have limited yellow on forehead and throat, males of the transferred population exhibit dramatic coloration changes, with shining yellow, red or orange on their heads. Furthermore, this area has often extended significantly, covering sometimes almost the entire head (crown, cheeks, lores and the area between the eyes and nape), and there is a broad black band through the eye. One hypothesis is that these abnormal colorations are the result of hybridisation between Seychelles Fody and Madagascar Fody *F. madagascariensis*, which has a bright red breeding plumage and is also present on the island. Only two cases of hybridisation have been reported between the two, but neither of these were breeding males. If this were confirmed, it would have important conservation

implications as these hybrids could represent a threat for the species' future if they ever reached the granitic islands. On the other hand, these colourful birds possess normal body measurements for Seychelles Fody and, apart from head coloration, do not exhibit obvious morphological characteristics of Madagascar Fody. If results of ongoing DNA analysis were to confirm that these birds were not hybrids, it would be a unique case of tremendous plumage coloration changes within a very short period of time. Further studies are in progress and will be reported shortly.

Source: Dr Gérard Rocamora, Island Conservation Society (Seychelles) / CRBPO-MNHN Paris in litt. February 2003

### Seychelles website

Seychelles Bird Records Committee has established a website at <http://www.stokecoll.ac.uk/sbr/index.htm>. It provides information on the objectives of the Committee, lists its members, and includes the Seychelles checklist and publications of the Committee (which can be downloaded), as well as relevant links.

Source: Adrian Skerrett in litt. October 2002

### Seychelles disclaimer

Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles, a Seychelles non-profit conservation NGO established in 1992, wishes to make it known that it has no connection with the newly formed Nature Seychelles (formerly BirdLife Seychelles) which has chosen the first and last words of the Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles name as its new title.

Source: Ron and Gill Gerlach in litt. July 2002

### What is the relationship between Madagascar Heron and Grey Heron?

Based on recent observations in Madagascar, Tiziano Londei speculates that the threatened Madagascar Heron *Ardea humbloti* and Grey Heron *A. cinerea* may be one, rather than two species. In particular, he describes the observation of a nest attended by adults of both species and containing two nestlings, one of which appeared to be an *A. cinerea* and the other much darker, perhaps the result of a backcross breeding. This and other data lead Londei to ponder the possibility of *A. humbloti* being a colour morph.

Source: Riv. Ital. Orn. 71, pp 207–209

### Range extension of Red-shouldered Vanga in south-west Madagascar

Field work undertaken in the remote

south-western region of Madagascar, in October 2000, extended the known range of the Red-shouldered Vanga *Calicalicus rufocarpalis* by c50 km southwards. Given that the species' habitat, semi-degraded subarid thorn scrub, exists to the south and east of the area surveyed, it is hypothesised that its actual range extends still further. The species, which was only formally described in 1997, is presently classified as Vulnerable and its habitat is under increasing human pressure.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. 122, pp 194–196

### ... and of Madagascar Red Owl, in the south-east

The rare and endangered Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei*, formerly only known from rainforest in the far north and centre-east of Madagascar, has been reported from Kalambatritra Special Reserve, in the south-east, where it was observed twice in June 2000. This extends the southern limit of its known range by c500 km.

Source: Ibis 144, pp 680–683

## Southern Africa

### A new pipit species from southern Africa

After four years of field work, Richard Liversidge and Gary Voelker have described a new African species, Kimberley Pipit *Anthus pseudosimilis*. It is principally restricted to South Africa and ranges from Namaqualand to Middleburg, through Free State to Rustenberg, with apparently isolated records from south-west Namibia and Kalahari National Park. In addition to a comprehensive plumage description, illustrated by a colour plate, the authors present notes on the new species' morphometrics, behaviour, vocalisations, nest and eggs and taxonomy. Although the new species is difficult to identify, both in the hand and in the field, it can be separated from the very similar Long-billed Pipit *A. similis* by plumage characteristics, habitat, nest site and behaviour, with Kimberley Pipit taking more steps between stops and more frequently flicking its tail. DNA analysis suggests that *A. pseudosimilis* is most closely related to Malindi Pipit *A. melindae*.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. 122, pp 93–109

### Additions and amendments to the Angolan list

Since the publication of Dean's (2000) *The Birds of Angola*, eight species have been added to the country's list, while two have had to be deleted. These are listed in a

recent paper (Dean, W.R.J., Dowsett, R.J., Sakko, A. & Simmons R.E. New records and amendments to the birds of Angola), which also contains corrections to the checklist and additional data. The new species are Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea [epomophora] sanfordi*, Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata*, Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, White-tailed Tropicbird *P. lepturus*, Red (=Grey) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. The two deletions are Gabon Woodpecker *Dendropicos gabonensis* and Blue Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina azurea*.

Source: Bull. Br. Ornithol. Cl. 122, pp 180–185

### Dogs outcompete wild scavengers

Numbers of free-ranging domestic dogs have reached unprecedented levels in Zimbabwe's rural areas. At the periphery of wildlife reserves they outcompete vultures at animal carcasses. The existing threat to wild scavengers is likely to be exacerbated by these dogs, whose population growth rate is 6.5% per year. The same phenomenon is probably occurring in many other African countries.

Sources: Animal Conserv. 5, pp 29–37; Oryx 36, p 218

### First Lesser Black-backed Gull ring recovery in southern Africa

On 6 December 2001 the remains of a freshly dead, ringed gull were found close to Torra Bay, on Namibia's Skeleton Coast. Subsequent research revealed it was a Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* that had been ringed as a nestling in southern Sweden, 9,126 km away, on 4 July 1998. This species is a common to fairly common Palearctic migrant along western and eastern African coasts, but is a rare visitor to the western coasts of southern Africa. This represents the first ringing recovery of the species in the subregion.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 7 (4), p 15

### Wattled Crane surveys in Botswana

In 2002 BirdLife Botswana's Crane Working Group managed to obtain funding to carry out a second aerial survey of Wattled Cranes *Bugeranus carunculatus* in the Okavango Delta. In 2001 the Crane Group also carried out an aerial survey of the Delta and found an estimated 1,220 Wattled Cranes. The estimate of 1,205 cranes in August 2002 was remarkably similar. In 2002 48 nests were located, a very similar number to that (50) found in 2001. The results of the surveys and nest

monitoring have been published in *Babbler*, the journal of BirdLife Botswana (formerly the Botswana Bird Club). The Okavango Delta is clearly still a very important stronghold for this globally threatened species.

Source: Stephanie Tyler in litt. October 2002

### Concern for the Okavango Delta

Aerial spraying of pyrethroid insecticides over the Okavango Delta in 2001 and 2002 came to an end in mid-September 2002. Tsetse flies have apparently been eradicated in the sprayed areas. Effects on other invertebrates, especially freshwater crustaceans, and on other wildlife, including insect-eating birds, are unclear. It is likely that aerial spraying will be undertaken in 2003 over the Linyanti Swamp on the Botswana/Namibian border. Meanwhile, off-take of water from the Okavango River to supply Windhoek in Namibia and possible abstraction of water for irrigation in the headwaters of the Okavango in Angola are all potential threats to the delta, as yet the only listed Ramsar site in Botswana.

Source: Stephanie Tyler in litt. October 2002

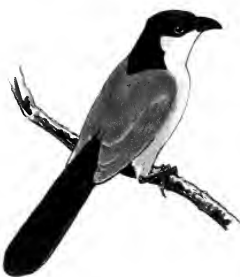
### Cape Vulture monitoring in Botswana

In a recent paper, Wendy and Remigio Borello document the breeding status and colony dynamics of the globally threatened Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* in Botswana. Ground censusing of 11 Cape Vulture sites was performed in 1992–1999, continuing a monitoring programme initiated by the authors in 1984. The potential breeding population of the species in Botswana is estimated to be c600 pairs. Over the eight years of study, eggs were laid in at least 436 of 477 nests (91.4%) at Mannyelanong, in the south-east, and chicks fledged in 248 nests (56.9% of eggs laid). In eastern Botswana eggs were laid in at least 1,825 of 2,101 nests (86.9%); c39% of eggs laid produced fledglings. There appeared to be a high annual turnover of nest sites within a colony and large-scale switching of breeding birds between colonies in some years; the reasons for this remain unknown. Disturbance by humans remains one of the main factors threatening the survival of Cape Vulture.

Source: Bird Conserv. Intern. 12, p 79–97

### Senegal Coucal with rufous underparts in Okavango Delta, Botswana

In January 2002 a Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis* with rufous underparts was seen and photographed near Mombo Camp, Okavango Delta, Botswana. The bird matched the 'epomidis'



Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*  
by Mark Andrews

morph, which occurs in high-rainfall areas in West Africa, east to Nigeria. As coucals are predominately sedentary, this record suggests, according to Phil Hockey of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town, that the gene for rufous underpart coloration does survive in the southern African population of the species, but is very rarely expressed.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 7 (4), p 14

### Save Strandfontein

One of the most important waterfowl refuges in South Africa is under severe threat from a road construction project. Strandfontein sewage works is an Important Bird Area (IBA) and supports significant numbers of nationally and globally threatened waterbirds, including Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* (Near Threatened), Cape Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capensis* (Near Threatened) and Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubii*. The road construction is to take place in six phases, of which one, to build a major highway through the northern part of the ponds, separating Strandfontein from neighbouring Zeekoewlei and Rondevlei Nature Reserve, is of concern. The ecology of these wetlands is inextricably linked and the road, and its associated infrastructure and secondary impacts, could disrupt the entire ecosystem. Strandfontein is an essential destination for birding visitors to Cape Town, although its tourism and

economic potential is little appreciated. However, a recent study showed that birdwatching activities contribute an estimated R170–220 million per annum to the South African economy, and this figure is rising. ABC members can assist in the conservation of Strandfontein by writing polite letters protesting against the road construction plan to: Mr Valli Moosa, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Department of Environment and Tourism (DEAT), Private Bag X447, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. E-mail: vmoosa@ozone.pwv.gov.za. Fax: (012) 322-0082. Please copy your letter/e-mail to Mr Dullah Omar, Minister of Transport, Department of Transport, Private Bag X193, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. E-mail: mabasam@ndot.pwv.gov.za. Fax: (012) 328-3194.

Source: World Birdwatch 24 (2), p 8

### More on the satellite-tagged White Storks

The last remaining White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* fledgling of the eight that were satellite-tagged in Cape Town, South Africa, in December 2001 had reached Egypt in June 2002. In fact, it briefly left Africa in early June, when it flew across to the Sinai Peninsula and back to Egypt, before moving to the Nile Valley, a little south of Cairo. To see the full route, visit the Avian Demography Unit website (<http://www.aviandemographyunit.org/>), click on 'White Storks', then 'Tracking 2002'. There is also a short cut via 'What is new' (which also enables you to find lots of other information added to the website).

Source: Les Underhill in litt. June 2002

### Colour-ringed seabirds in southern Africa

Several hundred Swift Tern *Sterna bergii* chicks from breeding colonies near Cape Town and Robben Island have been fitted with red-and-white engraved colour rings in 2002. Swift Terns are unique among southern African seabirds in that they are the only seabirds that breed within the



White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* by Mark Andrews

Benguela upwelling system on the west coast, and then move to the Indian Ocean coastline for the non-breeding season. The colour rings will enable a study of this general pattern in more detail, and for the first time follow the movements of individual Swift Terns. Birders are asked to keep a lookout for these birds when birding along the southern African coastline. Full details of the project, and information about the observations that need to be made are on the Avian Demography Unit website (see previous item) and click on 'What is new' or go directly to [http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/sterna\\_project.htm](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/sterna_project.htm). Other colour-ringed species include Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubii*, Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus* and African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini*. Sightings of these should be reported to SAFRING ([safring@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:safring@maths.uct.ac.za)).

Source: *Les Underhill* in litt. May 2002

### Cape Parrot gets its own website

The Cape (Brown-necked) Parrot *Poicephalus robustus*, whose plight has recently been featured in these pages (see *Bull. ABC* 9: 27–31 and 87), now has its own website. Established by the Cape Parrot Working Group, it is located at <http://www.cpwg.unp.ac>.

Source: *Louise Warburton* in litt. August 2002

### Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2002

On the afternoon of 11 May 2002 and morning of 12th, 339 volunteer observers, posted at 144 observation points throughout the range of the Cape (Brown-necked) Parrot *Poicephalus robustus*, counted 476 parrots on the first day and 634 the following morning. Observers saw parrots at 41 and 44% of the observation points on the respective days. The aim was to determine how many parrots survive in the wild and monitor their population trends. This was the fifth year that the Cape Parrot Big Birding Day has been held since the pilot study in 1997. The number of birds observed was the highest ever recorded; the previous highest count was 459 in 2000. This is largely a consequence of increased observer coverage, with all of the species' range covered, and good weather on the census days. Most birds (302) were recorded in the Eastern Cape, in the Amatola Mountain area from Alice to Stutterheim. The former Transkei had 111 birds, while KwaZulu Natal recorded 171, of which most were in the Creighton area. In the Northern Province greater numbers (50) were recorded than in the past. The Cape Parrot is usually considered a race of Brown-necked Parrot, but the next edition

of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* (in press) will treat both forms as species. The Parrot Day 2003 will be held on 3–4 May.

Source: Newsletter of BirdLife South Africa 5 (3), pp 15–16

### Southern Ground Hornbill re-introduction project

The Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus cafer*, the largest cooperative breeder in the world, has disappeared from c70% of its historical range in South Africa mainly due to habitat loss, secondary poisoning, the loss of large hollow trees used for nesting and persecution. A Ground Hornbill Re-introduction Project was initiated on Mabula Game Reserve, near Warmbaths, in 1999. Re-introduction was achieved by harvesting second-hatched chicks from Kruger National Park and acquiring injured birds in need of relocation from farm areas. The second-hatched chick can be removed with no effect on the natural dynamics of the wild population, as the elder chick out-competes its younger sibling for food, and the latter always dies of starvation within a few days of hatching. The project has been successful and ground hornbills are now free-roaming and self-sustaining on Mabula. Members of the group have been seen copulating and it is hoped that they will breed in the foreseeable future. Following this success, the project has now entered a second phase, entailing the harvesting of more chicks, the re-introduction of these onto reserves and farms within their historical range, and a full-scale population distribution study. Birders can help by sending both past and present information regarding populations of Ground Hornbills to Ann Turner, e-mail: [project@ground-hornbill.org.za](mailto:project@ground-hornbill.org.za) (tel/fax: 014 734 1788).

Source: Newsletter of BirdLife South Africa 5 (3), p 18

### Birds of some South African islands in 2001

Among the most recent issues of *Promerops* (the magazine of the Cape Bird Club) that we have received, that for May 2002 contains interesting accounts of the birds, particularly breeders, found on the important islands of Dassen, Dyer, Malgas and Robben in 2001, off the south-west coast of South Africa. Further details of *Promerops* and the Cape Bird Club can be obtained by e-mail ([info@capebirdclub.org](mailto:info@capebirdclub.org)) or on the internet ([www.capebirdclub.org](http://www.capebirdclub.org)).

Source: *Promerops* 250

## Southern Ocean islands

### SAFRING's oldest ringed bird

When members of the Prince Edward Islands Summer Survey Expedition visited Prince Edward Island for six days to count surface-nesting birds in December 2001, they encountered a ringed Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* sitting on an empty nest. It appeared that the bird had been found with a chick in the same area 27 years before, in April 1973. The same bird was previously captured at sea off New South Wales, Australia, in July 1960, when it was estimated to be between five and ten years old, and again in 1966, 1970, 1985, 1989 and 1994. It has now reached the age of at least 41 years, and its real age is likely to be closer to 50. This makes it the oldest ringed bird in SAFRING's database. It still appeared to be in good health.

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 7 (2), p 14

### Attempted rapes by Wandering Albatrosses

During the survey on Prince Edward Island reported in the item above, three attempted rapes by Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* were observed. In one instance, a female was pursued by seven males, with at least three mounting her. When she finally reached what was presumed to be her nest, she was greeted by the resident male, who had made no effort to intervene, even though the attempted copulations occurred within 5 m of the nest. This is the first time such behaviour has been reported from the island. Wandering Albatrosses are renowned for their strong mate fidelity, but the recent shift to a male-dominated population may be a reason for these extra-pair copulation attempts. Female Wandering Albatrosses have a lower survival rate than males, apparently because they forage further north and are killed more frequently on tuna longlines. It is estimated that there are already 24% more males than females at the nearby Crozet Islands. ♀

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 7 (2), p 15



Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*  
by Mark Andrews

# Requests for Information

## Database of Western Palearctic birds migrating to Africa and their conservation

A new EU-funded research project based at the Zoological Museum, University of Copenhagen, aims to map and analyse the distribution of Palearctic migrants in Africa, with special emphasis on passerines. The project's aims, together with a list of relevant species and links to other sites concerned with migration, are presented at [www.zmuc.dk/verweb/staff/bawalther/migratorybirds-africa.htm](http://www.zmuc.dk/verweb/staff/bawalther/migratorybirds-africa.htm). The completeness and quality of the database will depend on the information obtained from the international ornithological community. Thus, the organisers hope to attract possible collaborators, namely anyone with experience of working with birds in Africa, able to contribute published and unpublished data, especially grey literature. All contributions will be acknowledged. The project can be contacted via Bruno Walther, e-mail: [bawalther@zmuc.ku.dk](mailto:bawalther@zmuc.ku.dk).

## Stripe-breasted Tits at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda

Our understanding of passerine life histories has largely been shaped by accounts of European and North American species. In comparison with their temperate counterparts, tropical passerines tend to lay small clutches, have a more prolonged breeding season and may suffer greater levels of nest predation. Annual survival of established breeders also tends to be higher in the tropics, although regional comparisons are often complicated by phylogenetic differences. Studies involving closely related species therefore provide the most reliable indication of latitudinal effects.

Temperate tit species are among the world's most intensively studied birds, due, in part, to their ready acceptance of nest boxes. In contrast, most African tits are poorly known. In an attempt to investigate the breeding biology of two tropical tit species, 48 nest boxes have been erected around the Institute for Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC) research station at Ruhija (see *Bull. ABC* 4: 67–68) in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, south-west Uganda. Bwindi forms part of the Albertine Rift Endemic Bird Area (EBA),

and supports 24 of the EBA's 37 restricted-range bird species. One of these, Stripe-breasted Tit *P. fasciiventer*, is fairly common above c1,800 m, overlapping with the more widespread Dusky Tit *P. funereus*.

To date, eight Stripe-breasted Tit clutches have been laid in the boxes provided. Although clutches were small (3–4 eggs), nestling provisioning rates appear to be lower than in European tit species. As the project lacks funding, nest box inspections and other observations have tended to be intermittent, and have fallen largely to ITFC staff. Any offers of assistance would therefore be greatly appreciated, particularly in December–April. As well as providing a magnificent setting for field work, Bwindi hosts c350 bird species, and is home to c50% of the world's Mountain Gorilla *Gorilla gorilla beringei* population. The park is reasonably accessible, and flights to Kampala (usually via Nairobi) are comparatively cheap. Accommodation, available at ITFC, is also inexpensive. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Phil Shaw ([phil.shaw@snh.gov.uk](mailto:phil.shaw@snh.gov.uk)) or Derek Pomeroy ([derek@imul.com](mailto:derek@imul.com)). ☺

## Advertise in the *Bulletin of the ABC*

All advertisements must be sent **prepaid** (cheques made payable to the African Bird Club) as camera-ready copy, bromide/film or on floppy disk to:

Alastair Henderson, 34 Dudgeon Drive,  
Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4QL, UK.

If adverts are sent on floppy disk we can accept Pagemaker 6.5, CorelDraw7 files or unformatted ASCII text files and uncompressed TIF graphics files. If adverts are prepared on an Apple Mac the diskette should be formatted for PC.

The current rates are as follows and are based on a print run of 1,500 copies. These rates are guaranteed for the September 2003 *Bull. ABC*.

Please address all queries to Moira Hargreaves at the above address.

### African Bird Club Advertising Rates

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Full-page	£95	(210 x 145mm)
Half-page	£60	(100 x 145mm)
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Please contact Alastair Henderson on  
Tel: 01865 454594. E-mail: [hendersa@oup.co.uk](mailto:hendersa@oup.co.uk)  
(or write to the address given above left.)

#### Copy deadlines

Spring Bulletin	15 January
Autumn Bulletin	05 June



## ABC Conservation Fund

The ABC Conservation Fund supports small conservation projects in Africa. To date, Conservation Awards totalling over UK£10,000 (US\$15,000) have been made. These awards embraced a wide range of activities in five countries, from environmental education projects to research on endangered species.

ABC Conservation Awards are available to African individuals or institutions, or to individuals normally resident in an African country, and the Club welcomes project proposals for funding up to a maximum of UK£750 (US\$1,125). Further information on the Conservation Fund and guidelines on how to write a good project proposal can be found on the ABC website (<http://www.africanbirdclub.org>), or obtained from the Club address opposite.

## ABC Expedition Award

The ABC Expedition Award is a recent initiative. One award of UK£1,000 (US\$1,500) will be made annually. The closing date for the next award is January 2004. Full details can be found on the ABC website (<http://www.africanbirdclub.org>) or obtained from the Club's address below.

## Further information...

For further information about the African Bird Club Conservation Programme, please write to Stephanie Tyler, African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK, or by e-mail to [conservation@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:conservation@africanbirdclub.org)

## Update

### Conservation Fund Appeal receives boost from members and donation from WildSounds

The appeal, which was launched at the Rutland Water British Birdwatching Fair, in August 2002, has been a great success, and ABC has already made an award from money raised during the past few months. With a fantastically generous donation of UK£1,000, WildSounds kick-started the appeal at the British Birdwatching Fair. Duncan Macdonald, from WildSounds, presented a cheque to the ABC Chairman and encouraged other businesses at the fair to sign up as Corporate Sponsors.

The response from members has also been excellent. By the end of 2002 over UK£1,700 had been donated by 33 members from six different countries. Council would like to thank all those who donated for their generosity, and would urge anyone who would like to support the fund to contact the Treasurer at [treasurer@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:treasurer@africanbirdclub.org).

Our first award as a result of the appeal was made in 2003. ABC and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the UK BirdLife Partner) are jointly sponsoring a project to survey Congo Peacock *Afropavo congensis*, one of the rarest and least-known birds in Africa. It is also one of the most threatened, as recent unrest in the Congo Basin is likely to have opened it up to increased hunting pressures with people spreading out through the forests. The survey will



Duncan Macdonald, of WildSounds, presenting the cheque for UK£1,000 to Phil Atkinson, ABC Chairman, at the August 2002 British Birdwatching Fair, held at Rutland Water, UK (African Bird Club)



Congo Peacock *Afropavo congensis* (Alan Root)





concentrate on areas around Kisangani, and will visit areas previously surveyed and assess any population changes from those figures published in *Bird Conservation International* by John Hart and Dr A. Upoki, who undertook surveys in 1997. This is a really exciting and much-needed project, as the war that has ravaged the country has prevented much recent field work.

## Recent awards

### Waterbird surveys in Burkina Faso

An award of UK£1,000 was made during 2001 to Prosper Compaore, Conservator of 'la Mare d'Oursi' in Burkina Faso for a study of waterbirds of Sahel Burkinabé in Oudalan Province. The project aims were to find which species were present and their relative numbers, and the award also helped purchase equipment, such as binoculars, for the surveys. The Sahelian region harbours huge numbers of Palearctic migrants, as well as many intra-African migrants and resident species of waterbird. This project, our first in Burkina Faso, is an exciting one and will hopefully stimulate other projects in this important region.

### Small projects in Uganda and Kenya

During 2002 an award of UK£500 was made to Nature Uganda for a small conservation project and another of UK£1,067 to Nature Kenya for an expedition to study birds in the Mau Narok grasslands, of which a report of the expedition findings appears on pp.64–67 in this Bulletin. In Uganda, five undergraduates were funded to undertake short conservation-related studies, three of which were on birds. These varied from Grey-backed Fiscal *Lanius excubitoroides* in Mbarara to amphibians at Makerere University in Kampala. Such small grants (most were of cUK£35) are usually a student's first attempt at research, but experience shows that many build on this and not infrequently complete a higher degree and develop a long-term interest in conservation.

## Completed projects

### Waterbird surveys in the Koukilou Basin, Congo

In African terms, Congo ranks fifth in terms of bird species diversity, following the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Gabon. In early 2001 ABC supported Jérôme Mokolo Ikonga and teams from the Nouabalé-Ndoki Park to undertake surveys along the Likouala-aux-Herbes River and other rivers in the swamp forests of Lake Télé, and forests and savannas in the Likouala region. This area, despite being

more famous in crypto-zoologist circles for the Mokele Mbembe (a large undescribed animal, thought by some to be related to the dinosaurs), is also extremely important for birds.

The teams found 293 bird species from 62 families. During one waterbird survey 2,700 individuals of 33 species were noted, and on a second survey almost 9,000 birds of 39 species. Of note was the first record of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the region, and the addition of Black Egret *Egretta ardesiaca* to the national list in 2001. Another new species for the Congo was Senegal White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis*, captured in the village of Botongo. A Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudatus* was accidentally caught in a fishing net, but was subsequently released.

On the bird list of Central Africa, 651 species were admitted in 1999. In his report on the work, Jérôme mentions that less effort has been directed to avian studies in the Congo than elsewhere and that its bird list is almost certainly greater than currently known. Congo is certainly understudied and ABC would welcome further applications from this area.

### Waterbird monitoring in Djibouti

In February 2001 ABC part-funded coastal waterbird counts in the country. The awards were made to Geoff & Hilary Welch to train staff from the Djibouti government in survey techniques so that these surveys become self-sustaining. A team of six—Geoff and Hilary, Houssein Abdillahi Rayaleh from the National Tourism Office and Saso Fumiaki, Houssein Kirache Robleh and Moussa Omar Youssouf from the Ministry of the Environment—surveyed 24.5 km of coast between Doralé in the north-west to Loyada in the south-east (and 3,000 ha of intertidal mud), along which the team located three main wader roosts. The team also visited Oued Ambouli, Haramous Island and the *Medina Princess* shipwreck to count roosting Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* and Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*. In total, 66 species of waterbird were noted and a minimum of 10,072 birds counted. The Doralé–Loyada coast supported internationally important numbers of four species: Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* and Saunders's Terns *Sterna saundersi*. Recommendations were made for Phase 2 of surveying (March 2001–January 2002) to assess the year-round importance of the Djibouti coast. Geoff Welch reports that in addition to an article reporting on the training aspect of the work (which appears which appears on pp.30–32 in this Bulletin), another concentrating on the ornithological results and the follow-up counts in 2001/2002 is in preparation. 🐦

# Birds of Niaouli forest, southern Benin

Maarten van den Akker

La forêt de Niaouli se trouve sur le terrain d'une station de recherche agricole dans le sud du Bénin. Protégée depuis 1997, cette forêt semi-décidue de 150 ha (110 ha de forêt de plateau et 40 ha de forêt de bas-fonds) forme un îlot forestier dans la région. Des recherches ornithologiques ont été effectuées depuis 1997 pour établir un inventaire et étudier la migration intra-régionale. Au total, 166 espèces d'oiseaux ont été identifiées, dont 14 nouvelles pour le Bénin: l'Engoulevent à épaulettes noires *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis*, le Martin-pêcheur à ventre blanc *Corythornis leucogaster*, le Barbican chauve *Gymnobucco calvus*, le Barbion grivelé *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*, l'Indicateur pygmée *Prodotiscus insignis*, l'Indicateur tacheté *Indicator maculatus*, le Bulbul à queue blanche *Baeopogon indicator*, la Camaroptère à sourcils jaunes *Camaroptera superciliaris*, l'Erémomèle à tête brune *Eremomela badiceps*, l'Hylote à dos violet *Hyloti violacea*, l'Akalat à ailes rousses *Illadopsis rufescens*, la Mésangette rayée *Pholidornis rushiae*, le Gonolek fuligineux *Laniarius leucorhynchus* et le Pyréneste ponceau *Pyrenestes ostrinus*.

**B**enin lies in the Dahomey Gap, a region characterised by relatively low annual rainfall (800–1,400 mm) and by the presence of savanna almost to the coast, with a near-complete lack of the tropical forest that is a feature of coastal zones in adjacent countries. Until the 1970s, however, the region between the coast and up to 150 km inland still held relatively large patches of tall forest, typical of the Guinea-Congo vegetation zone<sup>21</sup>. High human population in the tropical south, where densities reach 250–416 per sq km<sup>23</sup>, has resulted in virtually all of this forest being cleared for agriculture<sup>5,27</sup>. Only small 'islands' remain: typically sacred areas, small privately owned holdings, and some state-owned areas consisting of plantations and small parcels of secondary forest.

In 1997, the author initiated a forest protection programme in collaboration with the Dutch Embassy, Centre Béninois pour le Développement Durable (CBDD) and the Netherlands Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (NC-IUCN). This led to the protection of one of the remaining forest islands, at Niaouli. The main objective is the conservation of extant natural forest, as well as research on flora and fauna for environmental education and ecotourism.

Niaouli is situated c70 km north of Cotonou (06°44'N 02°09'E). The forest belongs to the national agricultural research station Niaouli Attoyon, and consists of a plateau (dry) forest and a wetter bas-fond (humid) forest covering 150 ha in total. A reforestation belt (15 ha) protects the forest against bush fire spreading from adjacent agriculture, and c20 ha of degraded forest have been reforested with indigenous trees, including flowering species, eg *Milicia excelsa* and *Cassia siamea*, to enable bee-keeping activities. Three local rangers enforce a hunting and cutting ban. Other measures have been designed to compensate local

villagers who previously used the area as a source of firewood and for hunting. Two ecological trails, one through each forest type, as well as an observation tower on the plateau, were constructed to facilitate education on environmental and natural resources.

Since 1997, several inventories have documented the flora and fauna. A detailed checklist of the avifauna is being prepared through regular field observations and mist-netting, with the aim of not only identifying which species use the forest but also their population densities.

In 2000, an additional small research project was established in five other forests in southern Benin. In each, an inventory is being prepared using the same methods as above, and birds are ringed with the help of the Institut für Vogelforschung 'Vogelwarte Helgoland' (Wilhelmshaven, Germany). One objective is to observe intra-regional migration of resident birds, between the remaining forest islands. For example, a Western Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra obscura* ringed at Niaouli on 26 October 2001 was caught, on 13 February 2002, at Pobé (06°58'N 02°40'E), c80 km north-east of Niaouli.

## The Benin literature

Such research will also contribute to our still limited knowledge of the Benin avifauna. In comparison with neighbouring countries, relatively little has been published on the ornithology of Benin, and as recently as 1993 evidence was available for the occurrence of only 425 species in the country<sup>15</sup>, although more recent work, including the present contribution, has increased this total to 570 species (Claffey pers comm).

The early literature is composed of contributions by specimen collectors<sup>13,24</sup>, while several administrators and missionaries made additions in the colonial period<sup>7,9,14</sup>.

These were relatively meagre, however, and do not compare with those for Togo, particularly in the early colonial period, when an important contribution was made to the knowledge of that country's avifauna<sup>10</sup>. In the post-colonial period there have been occasional studies and surveys, most notably Green & Sayer's survey of Arli and Pendjari National Parks<sup>18</sup>. Holyoak & Seddon<sup>20</sup> provided distributional notes from a brief visit to the country, while Claffey's survey of the Bétérou area, in 1987–1995<sup>11</sup>, covers an area much further to the north, including the classified forests of Ouari Maro, Monts Kouffé and the Ouémé Supérieur (08°30'–09°12'N 02°00'–02°16'E), as well as additional notes from Borgou and other areas. He also published several short notes during the 1990s.

Of forests in the south, Anciaux<sup>2</sup> inventoried the Allada Plateau, including Niaouli, in 1991–1994, recording 124 species. A preliminary inventory of Lama forest (06°55'–07°00'N 02°04'–02°12'E) was published by Waltert & Mühlberg<sup>26</sup>, who recorded 106 species during 31 field days. More recently, Anciaux has published a study of intra-African migrants from work on the Allada Plateau and in the Lama depression<sup>3</sup>. Several unpublished reports, notably by Miriam Langeveld, who worked in the far north, have also been utilised in preparing the revised list of Benin birds (Claffey pers comm).

## Niaouli forest

For the purposes of the research the forest was considered to comprise two distinct sections. While there were many similarities in the avifauna of the two, some interesting differences were observed. A total of 166 species was found in Niaouli on 125 field days (see Appendix 1) during January 1997 to May 2002. Of these, 151 occurred in the plateau forest, while 105 species were observed in the bas-fond forest.

## Plateau forest

This forest covers c110 ha, including 25 ha of reforestation. Many of the semi-deciduous trees lose their leaves during the dry season (Fig 1). These consist of nine families and 13 species, eg *Ceiba pentandra* (Bombacaceae), *Triplochiton scleroxylon* (Sterculiaceae), *Antiaris toxicaria* and *Milicia excelsa* (Moraceae), and *Dialium guineense* (Caesalpiniaceae). Typical bird species of the upper storey are: African Cuckoo Falcon *Aviceda cuculoides*, African Harrier Hawk *Polyboroides typus*, African Green Pigeon *Treron calva*, Green Turaco *Tauraco persa*, Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis*, Naked-faced Barbet *Gymnobucco calvus*, Yellow-mantled Weaver *Ploceus tricolor* and Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis*. Understorey inhabitants include White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis*, Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapilla*, Brown Illadopsis *Illadopsis fulvescens iboensis* and Chestnut Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya castanea*.

## Bas-fond forest

This forest is irrigated by three wells permitting evergreen vegetation throughout the year (Fig 2). It covers an area of c40 ha, including 10 ha of reforestation. The tree vegetation is much more diverse than in the plateau forest, consisting of 28 families and at least 63 species, eg *Symphonia globulifera* (Clusiaceae), *Cleistopholis patens* (Annonaceae), *Cola gigantea*, *C. millenii* and *C. nitida* (Sterculiaceae), *Musanga cecropioides* (Cecropiaceae), *Piptadeniastrum africanum* (Mimosaceae) and *Entandrophragma angolense* (Meliaceae) which in Benin occurs only in Niaouli. Differences in the vegetation are reflected in the avifauna. Typical species of the canopy include: Red-thighed Sparrowhawk *Accipiter erythropus*, Buff-throated Apalis *Apalis rufogularis*, Western Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus brachyrhynchus* and Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus fulgidus*, while in the understorey are Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*, Western Olive Sunbird, Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens* and Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina*.

## Discoveries and significant records

Of the 166 species observed (Appendix 1), 14 are additions to the preliminary Benin checklist (Claffey pers comm) and several others concern species for which there was little previous evidence. The first evidence of breeding in the country was noted for a number of species. Status in neighbouring Togo and Nigeria is taken from the respective checklists<sup>10,16</sup>. Among the most interesting records are the following.

### Red-thighed Sparrowhawk *Accipiter erythropus*

Uncommon resident in Benin (Claffey pers comm). Previously known only from January and April records in Arli and Pendjari Parks<sup>18</sup>. Several records at Niaouli including a female mist-netted on 5 October 2000 (wing length 174 mm, tarsus 43 mm, bill 12.5 mm, weight 133 g; Fig 3). The absence of white uppertail spots indicate the nominate race as would be expected (W S Clark pers comm). Green reported 'a very doubtful record of nesting' at Natitingou in 1978 (Claffey pers comm). I observed material being collected for a nest c40 m above ground, on 6 March 1999, while the male was observed bringing prey to the nest for the female, on 13–15 March 1999.

### Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*

Only one previous record in the Forêt Classée de la Lama in 1994<sup>25</sup>. Recorded five times at Niaouli (in January 1997, August 1998 [three records] and March 2002) and twice at Lokoli marsh forest (07°03'N 02°16'E), in September 2001 and a juvenile on 25 January 2002.

### Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti*

The only previous Benin record was one identified by call in the Forêt Classée de l'Ouémé Supérieur (Claffey pers comm). In Niaouli, recorded in June 1998, February and

March 1999, November 2001, and March–May 2002. A noisy bird, identified in flight by its slow wing action, and confirmed by its very characteristic vocalisation. Rare resident in Togo and recorded in Nigeria. Rare and patchily distributed in West Africa<sup>6</sup>.

**Black-shouldered Nightjar** *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis*

Previously unknown in Benin. Recorded at four different forests in southern Benin in January–March 2002. In Niaouli, the species was identified by voice three times, usually at sunset and dawn. During a full moon it was heard calling throughout the night, at intervals of 8–10 seconds, and once two individuals called simultaneously. One was mist-netted on 24 February 2002, in a humid area of Lokoli (wing length 149 mm, tarsus 14 mm, bill 13.5 mm, tail 124 mm, weight 42 g; Fig 4). Rare resident in Togo but not uncommon in Nigeria.

**White-bellied Kingfisher** *Corythornis leucogaster*

Not previously recorded in Benin. One record near the plateau on 11 February 1997. Separated from Malachite Kingfisher *C. cristata* by its white belly and the forest habitat<sup>6</sup>, it was perched on the lowest branch of a teak tree at the limit between forest and adjacent agricultural land. Rare resident in Togo and an uncommon resident in Nigeria.

**Naked-faced Barbet** *Gymnobucco calvus*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Gregarious and very common, with several large colonies in Niaouli. An easily distinguished, dull, thick-billed bird, it often exhibits woodpecker-like behaviour when searching for insects in dead trees. Common to locally abundant resident in Togo and Nigeria.

**Speckled Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*

Not previously recorded in Benin but probably overlooked as its secretive behaviour makes it difficult to observe in the understorey. Sixteen records in 1997–2001, with singles mist-netted on 21 February 1999, 20 September 2000, 26 October 2001 (wing length 54 mm, tarsus 14 mm, bill 14 mm, tail 31 mm, weight 16 g) and 16 May 2002 (wing length 54 mm, tarsus 13 mm, bill 15.5 mm, tail 30 mm, weight 15 g; Fig 5). Common resident in Togo and Nigeria.

**Cassin's Honeybird** *Prodotiscus insignis*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Inconspicuous and secretive, and thus easily overlooked. Nine observations: April 1997, June and August 1998, February 1999, November 2000 and March 2001. Identification was based on behaviour, shy and flycatcher-like<sup>6</sup>, small pointed bill and remarkable white outertail feathers. Rare resident in Togo and an uncommon resident in Nigeria.

**Spotted Honeyguide** *Indicator maculatus*

Not previously recorded in Benin. One, in June 1998, within scrub forest adjacent to the tall forest of Niaouli. A dark olive-green honeyguide, identification was based on the remarkable stripes on the belly and white undertail feathers with clearly visible dark barring. Uncommon resident in Togo and a rare resident in Nigeria.

**Honeyguide Greenbul** *Baeopogon indicator*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Three records (9 January and 20 February 1997, and 9 April 1998) within mixed-species flocks, and a lone observation on 12 August 1998. All were in the lower storey. Similar to a honeyguide but more bulbul-like, the identification was based on the white outertail feathers while the white eye was noted on two individuals. Not uncommon resident in Togo and Nigeria.

**Red-tailed Greenbul** *Criniger calurus*

First recorded in Benin from Niaouli on 20 February and 5 March 1999<sup>7</sup>. Another was mist-netted on 28 November 2000. Very common in Lokoli marsh forest. Not uncommon resident in Togo and a common resident in Nigeria.

**Yellow-browed Camaroptera** *Camaroptera supercilii*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Six records (14 January, 20 May, 21 June and 30 July 1997, and 3 June and 18 August 1998). Identification of this small, short-tailed species was based on the yellow-olive upperparts, dull white underparts and obvious yellow supercilium. Uncommon resident in Togo and Nigeria.

**Rufous-crowned Eremomela** *Eremomela badiceps*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Three records, on 4 and 12 August 1998, and 20 February 1999. Identification was based on habitat, mid-storey of the forest<sup>6</sup>, typical insectivorous behaviour, the white throat, black breast-band and grey-white belly. Not uncommon resident in Togo and Nigeria.

**Violet-backed Hyliota** *Hyliota violacea*

Not previously recorded in Benin. A male was seen at close range from the observation tower on 15 May 2002, and identified by its remarkably dark upperparts, tail and head, white belly, and very active behaviour in the mid-storey, where it fed horizontally on the underside of leaves. Uncommon resident in Togo. Mackworth-Praed & Grant<sup>22</sup> state that it also occurs east from Togo but there is only one previous record, in 1986, of this subspecies (*nehrkorni*) in Nigeria.

**Rufous-winged Illadopsis** *Illadopsis rufescens*

Not previously recorded in Benin. One was mist-netted on 7 June 2001 (wing length 77 mm, tarsus 26 mm, bill 18 mm, tail 60 mm, weight 37 g; Fig 6). Despite the resemblance

to Puvél's Illadopsis *I. puvelli*, which also occurs in Niaouli, the mensural data and photographs permitted its identification as *I. rufescens* (L D C Fishpool pers comm). Listed as Near Threatened<sup>12</sup>, it is a rare resident in Togo, with only one record. The present record extends its range further east.

#### Tit-hylia *Pholidornis ruficapilla*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Ten records: in February (two), April, May (two), June and July 1997, and June and August (two) 1998. This tiny finch-like bird was identified by its pale brown, finely streaked head, throat and breast, and brown upperparts. Often in small groups of 4–6 individuals. Rare resident in Togo and a locally not uncommon resident in Nigeria.

#### Sabine's Puffback *Dryoscopus sabini*

Previously known in Benin only from Brunel's specimen in Museum national d'Histoire naturelle (Paris), which has been identified as *D. s. sabini*<sup>24</sup>. Two records, on 13 March and 20 June 2001. Both were males, the first was within a large mixed-species flock in the mid-storey and the second was searching for insects in the lower canopy. They were distinguished by the obvious white belly and rump, and black head, back and tail. Uncommon resident in Togo and Nigeria.

#### Sooty Boubou *Laniarius leucorhynchus*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Two singles on 27 March 1999. This is the only bush-shrike that is all black, with a large black bill and black legs, and that is found in lowland forest<sup>17</sup>. Behaviour is closer to that of a true shrike. Rare resident in Togo (only one record) and Nigeria.


#### Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus*

Not previously recorded in Benin. Although Mackworth-Praed & Grant<sup>22</sup> extrapolated that it occurred in the country, no documentation was available. Two were mist-netted, a male on 10 February 2001 (wing length 63 mm, tarsus 19 mm, bill 15.5 mm, tail 49 mm, weight 21.5 g; Fig 7) and a female on 30 January 2002 (wing length 69 mm, tarsus 17.5 mm, bill 16.5 mm, tail 53 mm, weight 21 g; Fig 8). Uncommon resident in Togo and Nigeria.

#### How to reach Niaouli

The forest is situated c1 hour north of Cotonou and 5 km from Allada, near Attogon. Follow the sign for the Centre Régional de Recherche Agricole, Niaouli for 3 km. The research station is on the left. Register at the small visitors centre. Reliable guides with good knowledge of the project, as well as the flora and fauna, are available, and it is possible to stay overnight.

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Captions to photos on facing page

Figure 1. Plateau forest at Niaouli, Benin (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 2. Bas-fond forest, Niaouli, Benin (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 3. Western Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter erythropus*, bas-fond forest, Niaouli, Benin, 5 October 2000 (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 4. Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis*, Lokoli marsh forest, Benin, 24 February 2002 (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 5. Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*, Niaouli plateau forest, Benin, 16 May 2002 (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 6. Rufous-winged Illadopsis *Illadopsis rufescens*, Niaouli plateau forest, Benin, 7 June 2001 (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 7. Male Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus*, bas-fond forest, Niaouli, Benin, 10 February 2001 (Maarten van den Akker)

Figure 8. Female Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus*, bas-fond forest, Niaouli, Benin, 30 January 2002 (Maarten van den Akker)

**Appendix 1.** Species observed in Niaouli forest, January 1997–May 2002, and their abundance

Categories used to record abundance at Niaouli forest follow those used in the Ghana checklist<sup>19</sup>.

Abundant (A)	invariably encountered with little effort, in large numbers in preferred habitat
Common (C)	invariably encountered singly or in small numbers in preferred habitat
Not uncommon (NUC)	often, but not invariably, met with in preferred habitat
Uncommon (UC)	infrequent and sporadic in preferred habitat
Rare (R)	rarely seen, often implying fewer than ten records

Nomenclature follows *Birds of Africa* Vols 1–6 and Borrow & Demey<sup>6</sup>.

<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	Little Bittern	R
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Cattle Egret	C
<i>Butorides striatus</i>	Green Heron	NUC
<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	R
<i>Aviceda cuculoides</i>	African Cuckoo Falcon	C
<i>Machaeramphus alcinus</i>	Bat Hawk	NUC
<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Black-shouldered Kite	NUC
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black Kite	A
<i>Polyboroides typus</i>	African Harner Hawk	NUC
<i>Circus macrourus</i>	Pallid Harner	R
<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>	African Goshawk	C
<i>Accipiter badius</i>	Shikra	C
<i>Accipiter erythropus</i>	Red-thighed Sparrowhawk	NUC
<i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i>	Black Sparrowhawk	R
<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>	Lizard Buzzard	C
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common Kestrel	UC
<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i>	Grey Kestrel	UC
<i>Falco cuvieri</i>	African Hobby	UC
<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	Lanner Falcon	R
<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	Double-spurred Francolin	A
<i>Amauromis flavirostris</i>	Black Crane	C
<i>Podica senegalensis</i>	African Finfoot	R
<i>Actophilornis africana</i>	African Jacana	C
<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	Greater Painted-snipe	R
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank	R
<i>Treron calva</i>	African Green Pigeon	C
<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>	Tambourine Dove	C
<i>Turtur aler</i>	Blue-spotted Wood Dove	C
<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	Red-eyed Dove	C
<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Laughing Dove	R
<i>Tauraco persa</i>	Green Turaco	C
<i>Crinifer piscator</i>	Western Grey Plantain-eater	R
<i>Oxylophus levaiantii</i>	African Striped Cuckoo	UC
<i>Pachycoccyx audeberti</i>	Thick-billed Cuckoo	UC
<i>Cuculus clamosus</i>	Black Cuckoo	R
<i>Cuculus gularis</i>	African Cuckoo	UC
<i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>	African Emerald Cuckoo	R
<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>	Klaas's Cuckoo	C
<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	Didric Cuckoo	UC
<i>Ceuthmochares aereus</i>	Yellowbill	C
<i>Centropus grillii</i>	Black Coucal	R
<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>	Senegal Coucal	C
<i>Centropus senegalensis epomidis</i>	Senegal Coucal	C
<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn Owl	NUC
<i>Strix woodfordii</i>	African Wood Owl	C
<i>Caprimulgus nigriscapularis</i>	Black-shouldered Nightjar	R
<i>Caprimulgus inornatus</i>	Plain Nightjar	C
<i>Telacanthura ussheri</i>	Mottled Spinetail	R



1



2



3



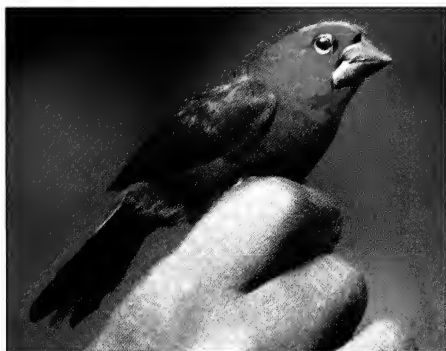
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7



8

<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	African Palm Swift	C	<i>Sylvia bonn</i>	Garden Warbler	R
<i>Apus affinis</i>	Little Swift	C	<i>Melaenornis edolioides</i>	Northern Black Flycatcher	R
<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>	Woodland Kingfisher	C	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	R
<i>Ceyx picta</i>	African Pygmy Kingfisher	NUC	<i>Muscicapa ussheri</i>	Ussher's Flycatcher	R
<i>Corythornis leucogaster</i>	White-bellied Kingfisher	R	<i>Muscicapa caeruleascens</i>	Ashy Flycatcher	R
<i>Corythornis cristata</i>	Malachite Kingfisher	R	<i>Myioparus plumbeus</i>	Grey Tit Flycatcher	R
<i>Merops albicollis</i>	White-throated Bee-eater	C	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	Pied Flycatcher	R
<i>Merops nubicus</i>	Carmine Bee-eater	R	<i>Bias flammulatus</i>	Shrike Flycatcher	R
<i>Eurystomus gularis</i>	Blue-throated Roller	NUC	<i>Dyaphrophyia castanea</i>	Chestnut Wattle-eye	C
<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>	Broad-billed Roller	C	<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>	Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher	C
<i>Tockus albocristatus</i>	White-crested Hornbill	R	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	African Paradise Flycatcher	C
<i>Tockus fasciatus semifasciatus</i>	African Pied Hornbill	A	<i>Illadopsis puveli</i>	Puvel's Illadopsis	R
<i>Tockus nasutus</i>	African Grey Hornbill	R	<i>Illadopsis rufescens</i>	Rufous-winged Illadopsis	R
<i>Gymnobucco calvus</i>	Naked-faced Barbet	C	<i>Illadopsis fulvescens iboensis</i>	Brown Illadopsis	C
<i>Pogoniulus scolopaceus</i>	Speckled Tinkerbird	NUC	<i>Pholidornis rushiae</i>	Tit-hylia	UC
<i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i>	Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	R	<i>Cyanomitra obscura</i>	Western Olive Sunbird	A
<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>	Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	R	<i>Chalcomitra adelberti</i>	Buff-throated Sunbird	UC
<i>Buccanodon duchaillui</i>	Yellow-spotted Barbet	R	<i>Hedypna collans</i>	Collared Sunbird	C
<i>Prodotiscus insignis</i>	Cassin's Honeybird	UC	<i>Cinnyns chloropygia</i>	Olive-bellied Sunbird	C
<i>Indicator maculatus</i>	Spotted Honeyguide	R	<i>Cinnyns venusta</i>	Variable Sunbird	C
<i>Dendropicos pyrrhogaster</i>	Fire-bellied Woodpecker	C	<i>Cinnyns superba</i>	Superb Sunbird	UC
<i>Mirafra rufocinnamomea</i>	Flappet Lark	R	<i>Cinnyns coccinogaster</i>	Splendid Sunbird	UC
<i>Hirundo senegalensis</i>	Mosque Swallow	R	<i>Dryoscopus gambensis</i>	Northern Puffback	R
<i>Hirundo abyssinica</i>	Lesser Striped Swallow	UC	<i>Dryoscopus sabin</i>	Sabine's Puffback	R
<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	Wire-tailed Swallow	UC	<i>Tchagra australis</i>	Brown-crowned Tchagra	R
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	C	<i>Lanius leucorhynchus</i>	Sooty Boubou	R
<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Yellow Wagtail	R	<i>Nicator chloris</i>	Western Nicator	C
<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>	African Pied Wagtail	R	<i>Phonops caniceps</i>	Red-billed Helmet-shrike	C
<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>	Plain-backed Pipit	NUC	<i>Dicurus adsimilis</i>	Fork-tailed Drongo	C
<i>Campephaga phoenicea</i>	Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike	R	<i>Onolus auratus</i>	African Golden Oriole	R
<i>Campephaga quiscalina</i>	Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike	R	<i>Onolus brachyrhynchus</i>	Western Black-headed Oriole	C
<i>Andropadus virens</i>	Little Greenbul	A	<i>Onychognathus fulgidus</i>	Chestnut-winged Starling	C
<i>Andropadus curvirostris</i>	Plain Greenbul	C	<i>Lamprolornis purpureiceps</i>	Purple-headed Glossy Starling	R
<i>Andropadus gracilirostris</i>	Slender-billed Greenbul	R	<i>Lamprolornis splendidus</i>	Splendid Glossy Starling	NUC
<i>Baeopogon indicator</i>	Honeyguide Greenbul	R	<i>Cinnyncinculus leucogaster</i>	Violet-backed Starling	R
<i>Chlorocichla simplex</i>	Simple Greenbul	NUC	<i>Ploceopasser superciliosus</i>	Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver	R
<i>Thescelocichla leucopleura</i>	Swamp Palm Bulbul	C	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	Village Weaver	A
<i>Pyrrhurus scandens</i>	Leaf-Love	NUC	<i>Ploceus nigerrimus castaneofuscus</i>	Viellot's Black Weaver	C
<i>Phyllastrephus albigularis</i>	White-throated Greenbul	C	<i>Ploceus nigerrimus nigerrimus</i>	Viellot's Black Weaver	R
<i>Bleda canicapilla</i>	Grey-headed Bristlebill	C	<i>Ploceus tricolor</i>	Yellow-mantled Weaver	C
<i>Criniger calurus</i>	Red-tailed Greenbul	R	<i>Ploceus superciliosus</i>	Compact Weaver	R
<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common Bulbul	A	<i>Malimbus nitens</i>	Blue-billed Malimbe	C
<i>Stiphrornis erythrorhox</i>	Forest Robin	C	<i>Malimbus scutatus</i>	Red-vented Malimbe	R
<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i>	Snowy-crowned Robin Chat	C	<i>Malimbus rubricollis</i>	Red-headed Malimbe	C
<i>Turdus pelios</i>	African Thrush	C	<i>Quelea erythrops</i>	Red-headed Quelea	R
<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Eurasian Reed Warbler	R	<i>Amblyospiza albitrons</i>	Grosbeak Weaver	R
<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	Great Reed Warbler	R	<i>Nigrita canicapilla</i>	Grey-crowned Negrofinch	C
<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	Olivaceous Warbler	R	<i>Nigrita fusconota</i>	White-breasted Negrofinch	R
<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	Melodious Warbler	R	<i>Nigrita bicolor</i>	Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch	R
<i>Prinia subflava</i>	Tawny-flanked Prinia	C	<i>Pyrenestes ostrinus</i>	Black-bellied Seedcracker	R
<i>Apalis rufogularis</i>	Buff-throated Apalis	R	<i>Spermophaga haematina</i>	Western Bluebill	C
<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>	Grey-backed Camaroptera	C	<i>Lagonosticta rubricata</i>	Blue-billed Firefinch	R
<i>Camaroptera supercilialis</i>	Yellow-browed Camaroptera	UC	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>	Bronze Mannikin	UC
<i>Camaroptera chloronata</i>	Olive-green Camaroptera	C	<i>Lonchura bicolor</i>	Black-and-white Mannikin	C
<i>Eremomela pusilla</i>	Senegal Eremomela	R	<i>Vidua macroura</i>	Pin-tailed Whydah	R
<i>Eremomela badiceps</i>	Rufous-crowned Eremomela	UC	<i>Serinus leucopygius</i>	White-rumped Seedeater	R
<i>Sylvietta virens</i>	Green Crombec	NUC			
<i>Macrosphenus concolor</i>	Grey Longbill	UC			
<i>Hylia violacea</i>	Violet-backed Hylia	R			
<i>Hylia prasina</i>	Green Hylia	C			
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	R			
<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Wood Warbler	R			



# New records of the São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*

Martin Dallimer<sup>a</sup>, Tony King<sup>b</sup> and Pedro Leitão<sup>c</sup>

Début 2002, les auteurs ont effectué des recherches dans la forêt primaire de basse altitude dans le sud-ouest de São Tomé, afin d'obtenir des données sur le Grosbec (ou Néospize) de São Tomé *Neospiza concolor*. Cette espèce gravement menacée d'extinction et dont il n'existe plus qu'un seul spécimen dans un musée, n'avait été observée que quelques fois, dans les années 1990. Les investigations furent concentrées sur l'amont du rio São Miguel, dont certaines parties n'avaient pas encore été explorées par des ornithologues. Le Grosbec a été observé trois fois. Son chant, qui est émis fréquemment, consiste en un sifflement de deux notes principales, la deuxième plus haute que la première, entrecoupé d'une note plus basse. Ce chant rappelle celui du Serin de Principé *Serinus rufobrunneus*, mais est d'un ton plus bas. L'espèce se nourrit près du sol et avait au moins deux plantes alimentaires, *Uapaca guineensis* et *Dicranolepis thomensis*. Les oiseaux sont curieux et bien visibles, ce qui laisse supposer que l'espèce est réellement rare et a une aire de distribution restreinte. Il est indispensable d'étudier l'importance de la population et son aire de distribution, afin de pouvoir mettre en place des mesures de protection adéquates.

São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor* is known only from one extant specimen and a few sightings in the 1990s<sup>3,4,6</sup> and is considered Critically Endangered<sup>2</sup>. Nothing is known of its population size, ecology or range, though the species is thought to be dependent on primary forest. The lack of records of *N. concolor* has been attributed to it being both rare and a secretive canopy dweller that is frequently overlooked<sup>3</sup>. Further information on the species is therefore essential to enable appropriate conservation action.

## Methods

We conducted two surveys of lowland primary forest in south-west São Tomé, on 4–10 January and 7–13 February 2002. These focused on forested areas in the upper reaches of the rio São Miguel Valley and surrounding ridges and tributaries. Although some of this area has been previously surveyed<sup>1,3</sup> there have been no records of the species in this area. Recent sightings have all been in the catchment of the rio Xufexufe<sup>5,6</sup>.

The area surveyed included the ridges connecting, and downslope of, the peaks Zagaia and Queijo, as well as some of those ridges marking the catchment boundary between the rios São Miguel, Xufexufe and Lembá. The altitudinal range investigated was 177–536 m, and parts of this region had not previously been subject to ornithological research. All descriptions of the grosbeak and its song are taken directly from field notes. Grosbeak sightings were made during a point-transect survey of all forest species on São Tomé. The survey covered three regions of primary forest on the island, including the lowland area described here<sup>4</sup>.

## Results

*N. concolor* was first seen by MD, on 7 January 2002, at 11.45 hrs along the upper reaches of the rio São Miguel (00°11'N 06°30'E; 380 m, GPS12 hand-held unit) within closed-canopy primary forest. The individual was foraging in a fruiting *Uapaca guineensis* (Euphorbiaceae) tree (Fig 1) c15 m up on a horizontal branch. Canopy height in the area was 17–24 m (Leica laser rangefinder). The huge pale, deep-based bill contrasted with the dark, reddish-brown thickset head and body. After a few moments it flew to another *U. guineensis* tree and out of sight. Only indistinct whistled calls were heard.

The second survey concentrated on forest below the peaks of Zagaia and Queijo, including several adjoining ridges. Sightings by all of us were made on a ridge running south from Zagaia towards Monte Verde, in closed-canopy primary forest. Canopy height was 12–22 m. The first record, on 9 February 2002 at 07.40 hrs (00°10'N 06°30'E; 400 m) was of a single, c10 m away, 1–2 m above eye-level feeding in and moving between *Dicranolepis thomensis* (Thymeleaceae) trees, 3–5 m high (Fig 2), which were fruiting and held both ripe and unripe fruit. The bird was large, brick-red, with a bone-coloured bill. The body was concolorous without discernible markings, and was noticeably darker than any similar species. The legs appeared pale and the tail was notched. After ten minutes feeding and singing, often appearing agitated, it flew off below the canopy; the flight was direct and relatively rapid (Fig 3).

The second observation occurred on the same day at 12.00 hrs, c1 km further south on the same ridge (00°10'N 06°30'E; 498 m) in a small opening within closed-canopy primary forest (canopy height was approximately 17 m). It was observed for c15 minutes. After flying rapidly across the ridge, c3 m up, it moved around in the mid-storey,



1



2



4

frequently singing. The bird was chased by a Príncipe Seed eater *Serinus rufobrunneus* and a Gulf of Guinea Thrush *Turdus olivaceofuscus*, before it settled c15 m away in the mid-canopy of a *U. guineensis* tree, where it was observed feeding, foraging and preening. There were also several fruiting *D. thomensis* trees in the vicinity. We obtained several more brief views as it flew rapidly around the opening, singing loudly. The overall impression was of a thickset bird. The body feathers were uniform dark reddish and the tail was slightly notched. The beak was relatively massive compared to the head and its pale, almost white colour contrasted with the head and body plumage.

The song consisted mainly of a two-note whistle, with the second note higher. The whistle was continuous, with a lower note between the two main notes, and frequently repeated. Song recalls that of Príncipe Seed eater, but is lower in tone. During the 30 minutes following each grosbeak observation we did not hear any other types of song or call. The seed eater has a much wider repertoire. The deeper tonal quality of the grosbeak and repetitive nature of the song distinguish this species from the seed eater.

Two further sightings were made by PL on the same ridge the same day. We also heard a grosbeak on 10 February at 07.55 hrs, 100 m below the south-west cliffs of Queijo, approximately 600 m from the first sighting (00°10'N 06°31'E), but were unable to locate it.

## Discussion

Our observations, the first concerning the species' foraging behaviour, demonstrate that it has at least two food plants, *U. guineensis* and *D. thomensis*. Both were among the commonest fruiting trees we observed. The former is endemic to the Gulf of Guinea and widespread throughout the primary forests of São Tomé, while the latter is endemic to São Tomé and Príncipe. Thymeleaceae is also endemic to these islands and contains only two species. *D. thomensis* tends to be restricted to ridges in primary forest, especially in the south-west of the island (F de Oliveira pers comm). Our observations confirm that *D. thomensis* was most numerous on ridges throughout the area. However, it also occurs on lower slopes, albeit less abundantly. Fig 4 depicts typical forest habitat in the region of our observations.

Our records do not support the frequently cited belief that the species is an unobtrusive canopy dweller that is difficult to see<sup>3,5</sup>. As many other species breed at this time of year, it is possible that the grosbeak is also nesting and therefore more conspicuous. Our observations suggest that it is both inquisitive and conspicuous, and will forage at easily observable heights in the forest. This may confirm that it is a genuinely rare species with a restricted range. However, the similarity of its song to that of the seed eater could make it possible to overlook the species, perhaps contributing to the impression of rarity. It is imperative that the population size and range of the grosbeak be clarified for future conservation efforts.

## Acknowledgements

We thank all the staff of ECOFAC in São Tomé for their logistical help and support, Rachel Atkinson for contributing to the field work, and Peter Jones for comments on the manuscript. Field work was funded by the Davis Expedition Fund, The British Ecological Society and The John Ray Trust. We would also like to thank Garmin (Europe) Ltd for supplying the GPS12 units. Further support was received from Berghaus Ltd. 🐦

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Captions to photos on facing page

Figure 1. Fruit and leaves of *Uapaca guineensis* (Martin Dallimer)

Figure 2. Fruit and leaves of *Dicranolepis thomensis* (Martin Dallimer)

Figure 3. São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*, São Tomé, 9 February 2002, at 00°10'N 06°30'E (Martin Dallimer)

Figure 4. Typical grosbeak habitat on the ridges south of Zagaia, south-west São Tomé (Martin Dallimer)



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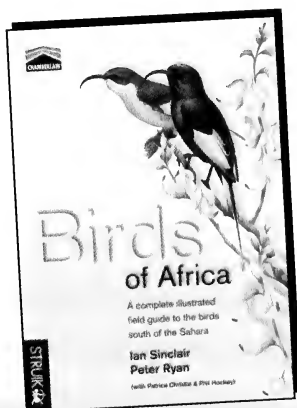
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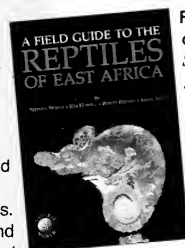
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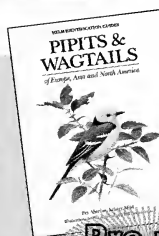


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# Is Dja River Warbler *Bradypterus grandis* really globally threatened?

Benoît Fontaine

La Bouscarle géante *Bradypterus grandis*, classée comme vulnérable par l'UICN et connue auparavant de sept sites seulement a été découverte dans un nouveau site au centre du Gabon. Compte tenu de ce que l'on sait de ses exigences en matière d'habitat, il est probable que cette espèce discrète soit plus répandue que ce qui était supposé jusqu'ici. Son classement comme espèce menacée serait plus dû à un défaut de prospection qu'à une véritable rareté.

The Dja River Warbler *Bradypterus grandis* was discovered at Bitye on the Dja River, Cameroon, in 1914<sup>7</sup>, but nothing further was known until 1951, when it was captured in southern Gabon, in two areas 40 km apart (M'Bigou and Mimongo) in the Monts du Chaillu, in dense vegetation within abandoned plantations<sup>9</sup>. Again, it took approximately 40 years before the species was rediscovered: in 1994, P Christy found a small population in a Cyperaceae marsh at forest-edge in Lopé Reserve, Gabon<sup>2</sup>. The song was tape-recorded and described, and appeared quite distinctive<sup>3</sup>, permitting others to search for *B. grandis* in suitable habitats in Central Africa, and the discovery of three further localities, in Cameroon (Nki Faunal Reserve and Lobéké<sup>4</sup>) and southern Central African Republic (Bai Hokou, Dzanga-Ndoki National Park; P Christy pers comm). Typical habitat for the species appears to be open *Rhynchospora corymbosa* swamps surrounded by forest, known locally as *bais*.

*B. grandis* is classified as Vulnerable by IUCN<sup>5</sup>, because it is known only from a very few small, scattered localities, and its total population is considered to be below 1,000 mature individuals<sup>1</sup>. This is a conservative estimate inferred from the few available data: the Lobéké (Cameroon) population is presumed to be over 100 pairs<sup>4</sup>, the Lopé population has 1–2 pairs and the Bai Hokou population a few pairs (P Christy pers comm).

On 26–30 May 2001, I was at Langoué (00°11'S 12°33'E), an area of dense mature forest with a large *bai* (1,500 m long and covering c20 ha) in central Gabon. During the five days, Dja River Warbler was heard singing almost continuously, with up to four individuals audible simultaneously, making Langoué Bai the fifth known modern-day site for Dja River Warbler.

This very elusive species will only be readily detected by observers familiar with its vocalizations or by mist-netting in suitable habitat, and can very easily be overlooked without knowledge of its song. Favouring areas close to ground level within dense marsh vegetation and very rarely taking flight, the species is seldom seen, and usually only for a few seconds. There are hundreds of *bais* in the forests of south-east Cameroon<sup>4</sup>, eastern Gabon (L J T White pers

comm), northern Congo<sup>8,11</sup> and the southern Central African Republic<sup>6</sup>, but they are often situated deep within forest and accessible only on foot and/or by dugout canoe, sometimes requiring several days' journey, making the likelihood of most ornithologists encountering Dja River Warbler small, and accounting, at least in part, for its scattered known distribution.

There appears to be no reason why Dja River Warbler does not occur in any *bai* in the region with dense (slightly saline) *Rhynchospora* swamp, as well as in marshes within more open habitat, such as in Lopé Reserve, and perhaps even in drier habitats such as abandoned plantations with dense undergrowth<sup>9</sup>. The species persists even in small marshes, the Lopé population having been recorded in a 10 x 50 m marsh annually since its discovery in 1994 (pers obs, P Christy pers comm). In Langoué, three spots chosen irrespective of the probability of finding Dja River Warbler

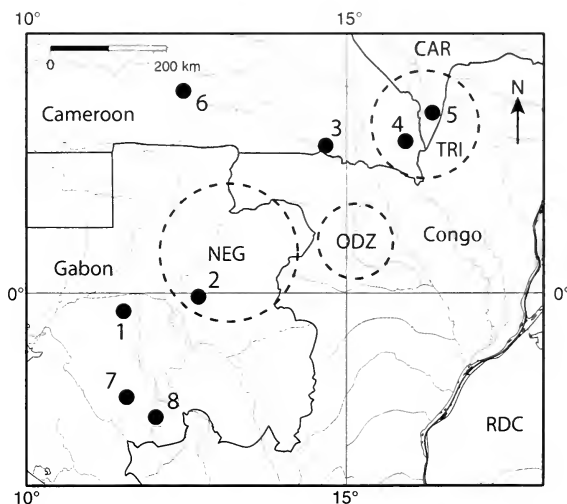


Figure 1. Sites for Dja River Warbler *Bradypterus grandis*. 1: Lopé; 2: Langoué; 3: Nki; 4: Lobéké; 5: Bai Hokou; 6: Dja; 7: Mimongo; and 8: M'Bigou. There is no recent confirmation of the species' presence at Dja, Mimongo and M'Bigou. Dotted circles indicate areas where *bais* are known to be numerous, but does not imply a lack of *bais* outside these areas. NEG = north-east Gabon; ODZ = Odzala area; and TRI = tri-national area.



Figures 1–2. Dja River Warbler *Bradypterus grandis*, Nki Faunal Reserve, southeast Cameroon, January 1998 (Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire)

(two being observation platforms for elephants and one an elephant track leading to the *bai*) produced four, two and two singing birds, all of which were probably different individuals, as the three localities are well separated. Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett<sup>4</sup> mention 'at least six singing birds holding territory in *Rhynchospora* marsh, in c6 ha' and 'a pair holding a territory in a 1-ha patch of *Rhynchospora corymbosa*' for Nki. From these figures, Langoué *bai* could harbour 20 pairs within its c20 ha. As there are many *bais* in the region, it is probable that the total population exceeds 1,000 mature individuals.

This habitat is not threatened in the near future: logging in Gabon is selective, with only 1–2 trees/ha being removed in logged areas<sup>10</sup>, and is usually not accompanied by swamp drainage. There are significant areas of forest with *bais* that have not been subject to logging, partially because they are too remote, such as the Langoué area, or because they are incorporated within protected areas.

For these reasons and provided that further field work in suitable habitat confirms that Dja River Warbler is reasonably common in *bais* in the area, the species is unlikely to meet any of the criteria for listing as Vulnerable<sup>5</sup>, permitting its transferral to Lower Risk (Near Threatened), its population being probably not more than a few thousand mature individuals.

## Acknowledgements

My observations were made during a study funded by the Wildlife Conservation Society. I thank Lee White and Ludovic Momont for permitting access to Langoué *bai*. Discussions with Patrice Christy initiated this paper, and I am grateful to him and Robert J. Dowsett, Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire, Lincoln Fishpool and Olivier Gargominy for their constructive comments on the manuscript. 🐦

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# Waterbird monitoring and birdwatcher training in Djibouti, February 2001

Geoff Welch<sup>a</sup>, Hilary Welch<sup>a</sup> and Houssein Abdillahi Rayaleh<sup>b</sup>

En février 2001, des comptages préliminaires d'oiseaux d'eau ont été effectués le long de la côte sud-est de Djibouti afin de déterminer la faisabilité de suivis réguliers à long terme. Cette zone est d'importance internationale et mérite le statut de site Ramsar. Par la même occasion, une petite équipe de conservateurs djiboutiens a été formée à l'identification des oiseaux sur le terrain et aux techniques de comptage.

Although best known ornithologically for its endemic gamebird, the Djibouti Francolin *Francolinus ochropectus*, and the spectacular spring and autumn raptor migration across the Bab-el-Mandeb straits, Djibouti also has an extensive area of mudflats along its south-east coast which has long been suspected as being of international importance for passage and wintering waterbirds. However, the area has never been counted systematically.

Following an IUCN-funded consultancy in December 1988 to collect and compile data for the ornithological section of the Djibouti government's National Biodiversity Action Plan (during which GRW and HJW first met HAR, Djibouti's only native birdwatcher), 29 projects were proposed to IUCN and the Djibouti government to assist in the conservation of the country's biodiversity, and various recommendations made to facilitate their implementation<sup>2</sup>. Monitoring of waterbirds along this section of coast was one such project and although requiring a comparatively small investment of resources, its implementation was considered to have great potential as it would contribute to fulfilling the objectives of four of the projects in the report:

**Exploratory site and bird survey work:** identifying the most important core areas for birds (and other wildlife); training Djiboutians in field survey techniques, bird identification and mapping skills; and field-testing standardised data collection forms.

**Regular monitoring:** monitoring of sites identified in project 1 and ascertaining bird usage through the year, or collecting comparable data at regular intervals at these sites to provide an index for monitoring bird populations. These data to be used to provide accurate baseline data and assist in prioritising sites identified as being suitable or potentially suitable for designation as protected areas.

**Sign up to and implement international conventions:** this would provide Djibouti with a broad structure of protection for globally important species and habitats; demonstrate the Djibouti government's commitment to species and habitat conservation; and provide access to the expertise and support of the global conservation movement. In the

case of the area to be surveyed, the relevant conventions were Ramsar and the African–Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

**Site designation:** enforcement of existing, and introduction of new, legislation for designating and protecting sites of conservation importance throughout Djibouti in order to establish an effective protected areas network.

## Monitoring results

A separate paper describing the count area and detailed results, both of this visit and subsequent counts during 2001 by HAR, is currently in preparation. As mentioned briefly in *Bull. ABC* 8: 148, a minimum of 10,072 waterbirds of 66 species was recorded, with internationally important numbers of three species (Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*) and three main roost locations located. In addition, several species formerly considered rare or vagrants in Djibouti were found to be more regular, and the first Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* for Djibouti was discovered.

## Training

The survey team consisted of GRW, HJW, HAR, Moussa Omar Youssouf, Houssein Rirache Robleh and Saso Fumiaki (Fig 1). With the exception of the authors, team members' birdwatching experience was minimal, therefore initially training concentrated on species identification and basic birdwatching skills. To assist this, extensive use was made of material in the Shorebird Studies Manual<sup>1</sup>, produced by the Asian Wetland Bureau, which provided team members with a good grounding in wader topography and feeding and flight action. The manual also proved valuable for covering topics such as writing field notes and survey techniques. At the start of the project each team member was given a selection of reprints from the manual plus a field notebook and pencil and access to field guides in both English and French (the official national language in Djibouti).

Throughout, the emphasis was on participatory learning and solving of identification problems, with team members




encouraged to consult each other and the field guides before, as a last resort, asking GRW or HJW. This worked well and helped build both individual confidence and team spirit. Wherever possible, simple fun exercises were undertaken in the field to test comprehension and to practice skills. One popular exercise was asking each team member to choose a species they felt confident identifying, writing a description with the bird in front of them and then describing it to the other team members. HJW sketched each bird from the description given and everyone attempted to identify it. This highlighted the basic pieces of information required for identification—size, shape, plumage and behaviour—and the need to record these accurately. It also helped test observation skills and concentration. Another fun activity was organised at the end of the survey, a ‘20-questions quiz’ to assess how much team members had learnt. Again this was much enjoyed and appreciated.

As much time as possible was spent allowing team members to practice waterbird identification and note-taking before any practice counts were undertaken (Fig 2). The nature of the study area permitted observation and counting to be carried out under a range of conditions, ranging from birds feeding along the shoreline adjacent to the road, affording close views of plumage details (Fig 3), to birds spread over the exposed mudflats at long range and in heat haze where use of size, shape and behaviour were critical to identification. When high-tide roosts were located, the additional complication of large numbers of birds congregated, often in mixed flocks, added another dimension to the training exercise.

Given the limited amount of time and, as it transpired, the range and number of species encountered, all of the team completed the project being able to identify the commonest waterbird species occurring around Djibouti city and understanding the principles of counting. It was accepted that for subsequent counts, accurately determining the numbers of individual species was likely to prove extremely difficult but that it should be possible to obtain overall waterbird numbers and detailed counts of the larger, more conspicuous species. Even given these limitations, the data will prove valuable for supporting efforts to persuade the Djibouti government to sign the Ramsar Convention and, hopefully, to establish means of protecting at least some parts of the tidal mudflats. The project also highlighted the considerable importance visiting birdwatchers can play in providing training and encouragement to local birdwatchers, who are often working in isolation.

## Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the Djibouti Ministry of the Environment, and particularly to Mr Mohamed Ali

Moumin, Director of the Direction de l'Environnement, for approving and making the necessary in-country arrangements for the survey. The Direction's practical support in making a vehicle, driver and our counterparts available were particularly valuable contributions to the success of the project. We are also most grateful for the support of the Office National du Tourisme de Djibouti (ONTD), particularly of its Director, Mohamed Abdillahi Wais. His generosity facilitated the involvement of HAR for the entire two weeks of the project. Financial support came from many sources: Wetlands International, OPS (Organisme de Protection Sociale, Djibouti), ABC (the African Bird Club) and OSME (the Ornithological Society of the Middle East). Equally valued was the donation of a telescope and tripod by the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) to Djibouti's new NGO, the Wildlife Protection Organisation. 

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<sup>b</sup>BP 1238, Djibouti, République de Djibouti.



Supported by ABC Conservation Fund

Captions to photos on page 32

Figure 1. Survey team (from left to right): Houssein Abdillahi Rayaleh (formerly Office National du Tourisme de Djibouti, now Ministère de l'Habitat, de l'Urbanisme, de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire), Geoff Welch (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK), Saso Fumiaki (Japanese volunteer working for the Direction de l'Environnement), Houssein Rirache Robleh (formerly Ministère National de l'Éducation, now Direction de l'Aménagement du Territoire et de l'Environnement au Ministère de l'Habitat, de l'Urbanisme, de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire), Moussa Omar Youssef (Direction de l'Environnement) and Hilary Welch (freelance consultant, UK) (Geoff & Hilary Welch)

Figure 2. Practising identification skills, Loyada coast south of Djibouti city (Geoff & Hilary Welch)

Figure 3. Birding at a roadside pool next to Présidence de la République, Djibouti city (Geoff & Hilary Welch)

Figure 4. Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Route de Venise, Djibouti (Geoff & Hilary Welch)



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## Corrigenda to *Bull. ABC* 9 (2)

On p 133, Figures 1–3 are by Paul Manners and Figures 4–5 are by J. & D. Hook, not as stated. Our apologies to the photographers concerned. On pp 153 and 154, the figures accompanying the paper on Grumeti river forests did not reproduce as intended. The correct figures are produced below.

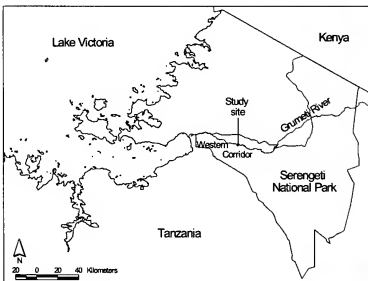


Figure 1. Location of the study site

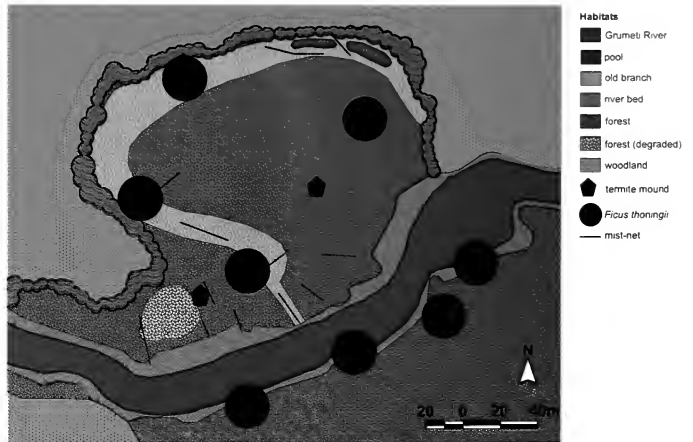


Figure 2. Main habitat types and structures of the study site.

# Diversity of food of the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in Korup National Park, Cameroon

S.A. Tamungang<sup>a</sup> and S.S. Ajayi<sup>b</sup>

Des données concernant la nourriture du Perroquet gris *Psittacus erithacus* ont été collectées dans le Parc National de Korup et ses environs, le long de transects dans des formations forestières primaire et secondaire. L'étude a établi que le perroquet mange les bourgeons, fleurs, fruits et graines de 14 espèces d'arbres appartenant à 13 familles différentes. La végétation secondaire était plus riche en nourriture que la forêt primaire. Chaque mois de l'année le Perroquet gris dispose d'au moins trois sources d'aliments, 64% des aliments atteignant leur maturité au cours de la saison sèche et 36% en saison des pluies. Pour survivre à l'état sauvage, l'espèce a besoin d'aliments divers. Sa capacité de diversifier ses sources de nourriture en fonction des saisons et des habitats a contribué à son succès dans l'écosystème de la forêt dense de Korup. Les résultats de l'étude permettront de diversifier le régime alimentaire des Perroquets gris en captivité et de mieux comprendre le rôle de l'espèce dans la chaîne alimentaire de Korup.

**F**ood items differ in nutritive value and availability. In the wild, foods occur patchily<sup>7</sup>, and a productive habitat may have many (or fewer) patches with greater food production. Most African parrots feed predominantly on plant materials, mainly fruits and/or seeds<sup>5</sup>, although a few are partially reliant on insects<sup>7</sup>. While, for instance, Puerto Rican Parrot *Amazona vittata* is known to feed on c60 plant species in Luquillo Forest<sup>9</sup>, little is documented concerning the diversity of foods taken by the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in the wild<sup>3,6</sup>. Detailed knowledge of the diversity of foods taken by the Grey Parrot is of utmost importance for restoring its degraded habitats in West and Central Africa<sup>10</sup>. The present study aims to contribute to our understanding of the ecological role of the parrot in the Korup forest ecosystem, and predictions of the likelihood of its presence or absence in the food chain in this area.

## Study area

Korup rainforest in south-west Cameroon comprises Korup National Park and its Support Zone (KNP). The park extends from 04°54'N to 05°28'N and 08°42'E to 09°16'E, and covers an area of c125,000 ha. It lies in the evergreen forest zone of wet coastal West Africa, being classified as lowland rainforest of the Guinea-Congo type<sup>8</sup>. Our study was undertaken in the southern part of KNP; comparative data were collected in two sample plots defined as follows:

**Park Sample Plot** is bounded to the south by Pamol Plantation, an agro-industrial oil palm estate. It is dominated by primary vegetation; the indicator tree species include: *Enantia chloranta*, *Azelia bipindensis*, *Strombosiopsis tetrandra*, *Obanguia alata*, *Xylopia aethiopica* and *Anthonothea fragan*.

**Support Zone Sample Plot** is located in the support zone of KNP and comprises heterogeneous and secondary vegetation, the result of diverse socio-economic activities. It consists of human settlements, farms, fallowed farms, hunting and lumbering sites, service roads, and small-scale plantations of cocoa, coffee and oil palms. The habitat is patchy as the result of land exploitation, and secondary forest indicator species include *Ceiba pentandra*, *Musanga cecropioides*, *Pycnanthus angolensis*, *Terminalia superba* and *T. ivorensis*.

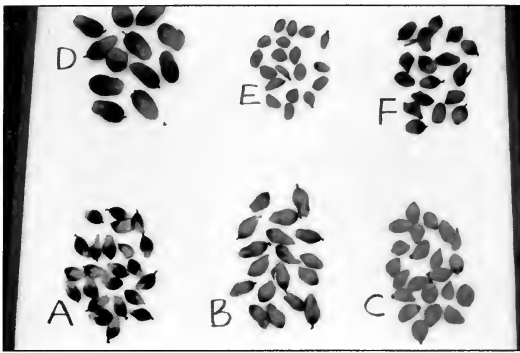
## Materials and methods

Each sample plot has an area of c4,500 ha. Line transects (mean length 6 km) were randomly established in these to monitor parrot activity. Data were collected by direct observation of parrots feeding. This involved walking transects and searching areas of fruiting trees where birds might be feeding<sup>2</sup>, their presence being indicated by the species' usual noisy behaviour at feeding sites. When a feeding parrot was located, information was recorded, and food remains and whole food items were collected for further examination and identification by a plant taxonomist. Data were collected during 1994 to 1996.

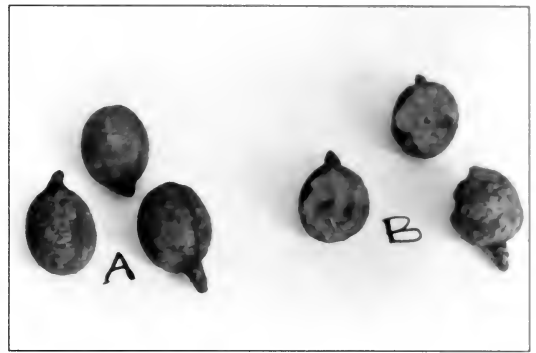
## Results

### Food diversity

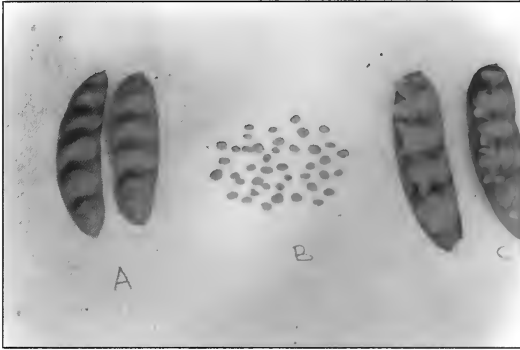
Several food types, belonging to 13 families and 14 tree species, were taken by Grey Parrot in the study area. Two food types were of the family Caesalpinaceae, another two of the family Burseraceae, and the other families were each represented by one tree species (Table 1). The birds were observed feeding on buds, flowers, fruits and seeds. In all, three flower sources (20%), four seed sources (26.7%) and seven fruit sources (53.3%) were identified. Information



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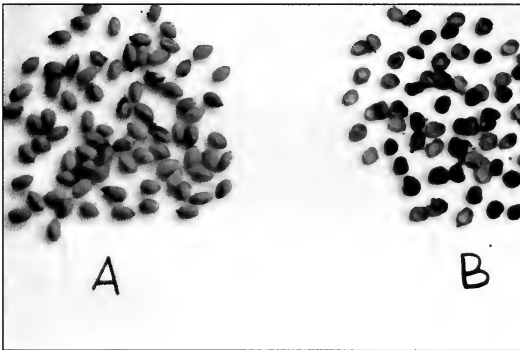
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Figures 1–5. Foods of the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* (S.A. Tamungang)

1. *Elaeis guineensis* varieties at different stages of ripening (most preferred is D, while leftovers of the fruit after being eaten are depicted in F)
2. *Pycnanthus angolensis* young fruits (A = whole fruits and B = leftovers after the parrots have extracted the soft seeds)
3. *Albizia gummifera* (A = whole fruits, B = seeds eaten by Grey Parrot and C = method of seed extraction by Grey Parrot)
4. *Blighia welwitschii* (Grey Parrot feeds on the fawn aril attached to the seeds)
5. *Dialium guineense* (A = seeds eaten by Grey Parrot and B = leftover seed shells)

was also obtained from secondary sources of six types of food taken by the Grey Parrot (Table 2).

#### Food distribution in sample plots

Ten food sources (74.3%) were found in the Support Zone sample plot. Four food sources (25.7%) were present in both plots (Table 1). The Support Zone appears to be richer in food resources than the park itself.

#### Monthly and seasonal distribution of food sources

Food types were further classified by the month in which the part consumed by the parrot matured. There were at least three mature food types each month (Table 3), fewest in August, then June and September. March had the highest number of food sources (eight). There are two major seasons in the study area, the wet (April–October) and dry seasons (November–March). Based on seasonality, the wet season had 35.9% and the dry season 64.1% of food sources.

#### Discussion

Grey Parrot takes a variety of foods in Korup, including over 14 species of trees and exploiting various plant parts. In Ghana, Dandliker<sup>4</sup> recorded the species feeding on nine tree species. It is known to feed on fruits and seeds in the wild<sup>6</sup> but we found that flowers represented 20% of its food. The parrot also feeds on buds<sup>4</sup>. A study in Lobéké,

**Table 1.** Food species of the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in Korup National Park, Cameroon, during 1994 to 1996.

Tree species	Family	Part consumed	Dominant sample plot
<i>Alstonia boonei</i>	Apocynaceae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Macaranga spinosa</i>	Eupobiaceae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Daniellia ogea</i>	Caesalpinaceae	Flower	Support Zone / Park
<i>Dialium guineense</i>	Caesalpinaceae	Seed	Support Zone
<i>Albizia gummifera</i>	Mimosaceae	Seed	Support Zone
<i>Dacryodes edulis</i>	Burseraceae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Dacryodes microphylla</i>	Burseraceae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>	Palmae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Pycnanthus angolensis</i>	Myristicaceae	Fruit	Support Zone
<i>Blighia welwitschii</i>	Sapindaceae	Fruit	Support Zone / Park
<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>	Bignoniaceae	Flower	Support Zone
<i>Ceiba pentandra</i>	Bombacaceae	Seed / Flower bud	Support Zone
<i>Symphonia globulifera</i>	Guttiferae	Flower	Support Zone / Park
<i>Treulia africana</i>	Moraceae	Seed	Support Zone/Park

south-east Cameroon, revealed that the Grey Parrot consumes weeds, herbs and soil<sup>1</sup>.

The availability of several food sources each month may ensure a balanced diet of nutrients for the parrot. Seasonal diet shifts, caused by the absence of preferred food types, were noted. For example, during seasons with poor plum yield, the parrots consume more *Macaranga spinosa* and *Elaeis guineensis*. Some tree species fruit longer than others in the same habitat, eg *Symphonia globulifera* produces flowers over seven months of the year. Varied fruiting phenologies provide different fruits year-round. Food availability changes seasonally, according to phenology and renewal rate<sup>11</sup>.

Oil palm fruits are available to the parrots year-round and the Pamol plantation is important in this respect. Fruit are the most frequently taken foods of the species<sup>6</sup>. 'Crunch periods' or critical seasons for food may result from reduced

diversity and not scarcity. The ability of the species to diversify its food resources seasonally has contributed to its varied feeding behaviour in Korup.

Socio-economic activities at KNP have resulted in the growth of secondary vegetation that has enhanced the

**Table 2.** Unconfirmed food species of the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in Korup National Park, Cameroon.

Tree species	Family	Part consumed
<i>Azelia africana</i>	Caesalpinoideae	Bud
<i>Strephonema pseudocola</i>	Combretaceae	Seed
<i>Sterculia tragacantha</i>	Sterculiaceae	Seed
<i>Strychnos spinosa</i>	Loganiaceae	Seed
<i>Eribroma oblongum</i>	Sterculiaceae	Seed
<i>Terminalia glaucescens</i>	Combretaceae	Seed

**Table 3.** Monthly presence of foods of the Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in Korup National Park, Cameroon.

Tree species	Monthly food presence											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>Alstonia boonei</i>	*	*	*	*	*							
<i>Macaranga spinosa</i>					*	*	*					
<i>Daniellia ogea</i>			*	*	*							
<i>Dalium guineense</i>										*	*	*
<i>Albizia gummifera</i>							*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Dacryodes edulis</i>						*	*	*	*			
<i>Dacryodes microphylla</i>						*	*	*	*			
<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Pycnanthus angolensis</i>	*	*	*	*	*							
<i>Blighia welwitschii</i>		*	*	*								
<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>									*	*	*	*
<i>Ceiba pentandra</i>	*	*	*								*	*
<i>Symphonia globulifera</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*					
<i>Treulia africana</i>		*	*									
Total number of food sources	5	7	8	6	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	5

availability of food sources for the parrot. Food availability is also related to the phenological processes of the plants comprising the vegetation communities; most of the plants shed their leaves in the early dry season. Some, eg *Ceiba pentandra*, produce flowers and buds when the leaves are shed. The parrot feeds on the buds and subsequently on the seeds, ensuring maximum exploitation of the fruiting tree.

## Conclusion

Fourteen tree species belonging to 12 families were identified as food sources of the Grey Parrot in KNP. Foods consist of buds, flowers, fruits and seeds but only the oil palm fruit is available all year. Food resources of the parrot are patchily distributed, and despite the species' broad dietary preferences, availability can determine its diet at certain periods of the year. Grey Parrot requires a diversity of foods in KNP. The Support Zone is richer in food resources than the park itself, but this hinders the species' conservation because it is difficult to control parrot exploitation outside the park. Our findings should be used to improve the food-degraded habitats of the parrot, check nutrient deficiencies of the species' diet in captivity, and develop an understanding of the role of the Grey Parrot in the food chain dynamics within KNP.

## Acknowledgements

V.S. Balinga, N. Songwe, A.A. Green, Z.E. Akum and many others who have worked on the Korup Project assisted SAT in many ways. Epkwe Kennedy made an excellent field assistant. Roger Wilkinson of Chester Zoo offered valuable technical assistance, and Keneth Usongo and Estella Tamungang assisted at various stages during the manuscript preparation. ♀

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## Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands: Priority Sites for Conservation

*Edited by Lincoln Fishpool and Michael Evans, 2001. 1,144 pp, 15 pp of colour photographs, many maps and line drawings. Newbury and Cambridge, UK: Pisces Publications and BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series 11). UK£55 plus postage & packing. Orders to Pisces Publications, NatureBureau, 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Road, Newbury RG14 5SJ. E-mail: pisces@naturebureau.co.uk.*

The first thing to strike you about this hugely important work is its physical size. In fact it is one of the few review books I have meaningfully weighed on the bathroom scales! At over 3.5 kg in weight, and with its 1,144 pages representing the labours of hundreds of people over a nine-year period, it is a monumental work in every sense.

It comprises an inventory of Important Bird Areas considered of global significance for their avifaunal and other wildlife populations. All of them are located in the African region and associated islands. The latter group includes not just the Comoros, Madagascar, the Seychelles and St Helena, with its neighbouring British-administered dependent territories, but also archipelagos lying beyond the 45°S meridian: the Norwegian dependency of Bouvetøya and the French-controlled Southern Territories (including Crozet, Kerguelen, St Paul and Amsterdam).

In all 58 geopolitical entities have been considered and a list of 1,228 sites has been drawn up. These represent a total land surface area of over 2 million km<sup>2</sup>, and equivalent to a territory greater than Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain combined. To put this in its true context, however, it represents just 7% of Africa's land surface. Yet the authors argue that if the biological riches of this site network were secured then it would safeguard the futures for a very high percentage of Africa's 2,300 bird species, as well as many other life forms.

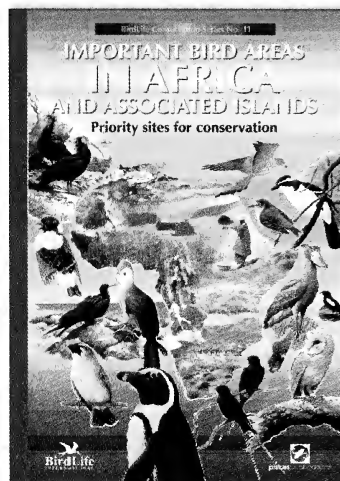
The process behind the assembly of this critically important site inventory was both painstaking and sophisticated. Yet, as we have come to expect from BirdLife publications, the complex body of data is

beautifully presented on high-quality paper, with easy-on-the-eye typefaces and dense blocks of text marshalled within a convenient system of headings and different-coloured fonts. All of this careful consideration by the editors and designers ensures that the information is as easy to assimilate as possible.

The first 50 pages of the book are broken down into four main chapters: 1 an overall introduction to the scope and importance of Africa's site network; 2 the methods by which sites were selected; 3 a consideration of the 15 biomes in Africa (in layman's terms, the vegetational building bricks from which Africa's natural environment is assembled); 4 an overview of the IBA book project and the recommendations which flow from its completion.

The philosophy behind the IBA system is now well established. The first book in a growing regional series, *Important Bird Areas in Europe* edited by Richard Grimmett and Tim Jones, was published in 1989 and has since come to play a central part both in the formulation of conservation policy in the continent and also in its implementation. Yet in the new book the authors address some of the shortcomings of the IBA system, which have become apparent since that initial volume. In particular a network of specific, and sometimes relatively small, sites cannot address the conservation of species that are threatened by environmental change, but have no significant population concentration in any one place. These widespread but often thinly distributed birds are now given more thorough consideration through the application of new criteria for site selection. These IBAs attempt to support what are called biome-restricted assemblages.

Fishpool and Evans give the example of the Sudan-Guinea Savanna biome, to which 54 species are confined, including spectacular and beautiful birds like Red-throated Bee-eater *Merops bulcocki* and Long-tailed Paradise Whydah *Vidua interjecta*. A network of 105 sites across 22 countries has thus been drawn up which, as a whole, gives protection to all 54 species. Yet in addition each national site has been selected to support over 80% of the Guinea-Savanna-restricted birds found in that country. To aid a layperson's



comprehension of this aspect of IBA selection, there is a large series of colour photographs illustrating the 15 biomes of Africa and Madagascar.

Following this detailed explanation of the mechanics of site selection comes almost 1,000 pages on the sites themselves, arranged by country on an alphabetical basis. Each national section is prefaced by a general introduction, an overview of the country's ornithological importance and its conservation infrastructure. Every site account then has a tripartite structure: a physical description, an essay on its avifauna and a brief snapshot of the conservation issues relating to the site. Sadly—and here I come to my one adverse criticism—the species are listed only by their scientific names (because, its authors, argue there is a substantial African francophone community for whom English names would be difficult).

Here, then, is a brief outline of the nuts and bolts of this huge tome, but the more critical issue to tackle is its significance, which I think it would be almost impossible to overstate. *Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands* ranks alongside Collar and Stuart's *Threatened birds of Africa and Related Islands*, the multi-volume *The Birds of Africa* and Dowsett and Dowsett-Lemaire's *A Contribution to the Distribution and Taxonomy of Afrotropical and Malagasy Birds*, as one of the most important works

on the region's ornithology in the last 30 years. Its editors, together with their numerous contributors across the whole continent, deserve the highest praise for seeing such an ambitious project through to completion.

The book's value falls neatly into two halves. On the one hand it is a single-volume compendium of all we know about the region's most bird-rich landscapes and is therefore a critical departure point for all future conservation activity on the continent. The foremost challenge which it highlights is the lack of legal protection for 44% of the IBAs. Given that all the 1,228 sites make up just 7% of the continent's land surface, the safeguarding of the entire IBA network represents a relatively modest and attainable goal, even when one takes into account the massive human-development obstacles confronting African society.

As well as offering us a conservation map for decades to come, the book has an important negative function, which the authors acknowledge all too readily. It is as much a benchmark for what remains to be discovered, as it is a statement of what is now known. The book has the potential to inform almost all our ornithological activity on the continent, enabling amateurs and professionals alike to supply the many missing fragments to the overall picture.

There is little doubt that it is primarily a technical manual aimed both at informing environmental professionals and convincing African decision-makers to implement its powerful conservation message. On that basis alone I suspect many ABC members will want to own a copy. Yet I think it also has a surprisingly strong appeal to a much more general birding community (which would have been far stronger had English names also been included!). It provides a valuable and authoritative outline of ornithology in every African country, while the site-by-site information is extremely useful for shaping recreational birding itineraries. It also indicates where ordinary birders can make valuable contributions to any ongoing site database.

Finally, and not least, I think the book provides enormous satisfaction simply to the armchair birder, allowing us to dream about countries few of us will ever see. Take Chad, for instance, a country with just eight IBAs. Yet of these, one is the Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim region, among the largest protected areas in all Africa. It extends for almost 8 million ha, is described as largely featureless (!) terrain and in the short rainy season is thought to hold thousands of Palearctic waterbirds.

Yet judging from the references hardly more than a handful of birders have been there in the last two decades. Now there's an opening for an enterprising young undergraduate!

Mark Cocker

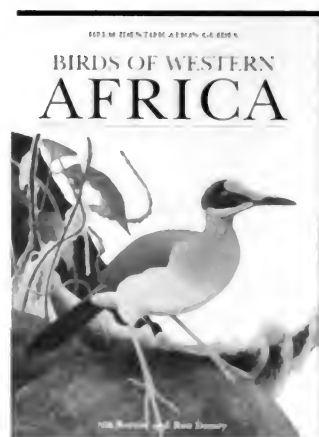
## Birds of Western Africa

Nik Borrow and Ron Demey. 2001. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 816 pp, 147 colour plates and over 1,100 colour distribution maps. UK£55.

Anyone who has been or ever wanted to go birding in West Africa—with the exception of The Gambia—will have been frustrated by the lack of a good comprehensive bird identification guide. It seems almost a decade since this project first drew my attention and I have been waiting in excited anticipation/frustration ever since, longing for the day when visitors would be equipped with something more substantial than Serle *et al.* Western Africa is defined as the region extending from Mauritania, in the north-west Sahel, east to Chad and the Central African Republic, south to and including Congo-Brazzaville. The Cape Verde Islands and Gulf of Guinea Islands, Annobon, São Tomé, Príncipe and Bioko are also included, but the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaïre) is not.

The book begins with a brief introductory section consisting of a series of chapters outlining the scope of the book, a comprehensive breakdown of the species accounts section and, in my view, too brief a section on climate, topography and the main habitats. With such a mammoth task, this is not really surprising, as this is a bird identification guide above all else and little space is devoted to other than the main body: the species accounts, maps and plates. However, with an ever-increasing threat to the West African environment, this I feel was an opportunity missed. There is also a short section on restricted-range species and Endemic Bird Areas, and definitions of taxonomy. For taxonomy, sequence and scientific names, the book generally follows *The Birds of Africa*, although in some cases the suggestions of Dowsett & Forbes-Watson<sup>2</sup> or other recent authors, whose views are considered more advanced or consistent, are employed.

Dealing with almost 1,300 species and covering 23 countries, the scope of this work must have been quite daunting. There are 147 original colour plates, all painted by Nik Borrow, comprising over 3,000 figures and depicting almost every species described. When considering the work involved, it is unsurprising that this



publication took a little longer than expected. There is a consistency to the work that is very pleasing to the eye. The plates are generally well arranged and do not appear unduly cluttered, although this seems to have been unavoidable in some of the raptor and gull plates, which required images of flying birds alongside perched individuals. The artwork is to a very high standard and, to my eye, remarkably accurate. Having scrutinised the originals several times during the years prior to publication, I feel it rather unfair to criticise at this stage. However, as reviewer, I feel that a couple of points deserve voicing. I think plate 87—of the *Andropadus* bulbuls—contains some of the finest illustrations ever produced of this tricky group, perfectly capturing the salient features. That they were not reproduced slightly larger, thereby diminishing the glaring white paper surrounding each image, is a crying shame. I feel that the swifts better deserved two plates as it is somewhat difficult to discern the relevant features. Whether the plate has been reproduced slightly too dark, I'm not sure, but Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myioptilus* should be paler brown than Common Swift *Apus apus*. On the second nightjar plate, Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis* is depicted with full pennants, a feature I'm not sure is ever observed in the region. The two plates of vagrants rather 'let the side down', particularly the gulls and auks, which may have been last-minute inclusions that do not really sit well within the rest of this classy work. However, this really is nitpicking for this is a superb body of work. Special mention should be given to the four bulbul plates, the warblers, *Malacotus* bush-shrikes and weavers. And, extra-special praise for the superb trio of sunbird plates, for Nik's distinctive style



takes them to the next level, stunning indeed!

The facing page from each plate initially comprises a brief introduction to the relevant family, followed by the plate captions including measurements, status and general distribution. The maps are incorporated into the main body of text alongside each species account. Some birders may not like this, but here I agree with the author's decision, as it creates greater flexibility, permits for more detail and, besides, the plate caption already offers a broad indication of range. As has become standard in identification guides, each species account covers plumage, voice, habits, similar species and status and distribution. It is clear that the author has a great deal of experience in the region because, despite being brief, all are remarkably authoritative. Closing each voice section is a reference to the relevant CD and track number of the Chappuis<sup>1</sup> *African Bird Sounds* series, which is a particularly useful feature. Ron Demeý has managed to incorporate some very useful information, no doubt including many notes from personal observation in the relatively brief sections on habits and similar species, and deserves our congratulation for setting a really high standard. Status and distribution is equally brief but authoritative, and includes Red Data book categories. Where applicable, a short taxonomic note completes the species account. The text includes each bird's French name and there is a French index as well, a must in a region where this language is widely spoken. I have often wished for this, as I frequently meet people in northern Cameroon who know the French names but are at a loss in English.

A quite superior distribution map accompanies each species account, using colours that are very comfortable on the eye, and clearly indicate the extent of range at each season. There are a couple of pages of line drawings, one, depicting hornbills in flight should prove very useful and another, showing different weaver bird nests, is an excellent idea. Following the species accounts, a very useful references section is divided into four parts: general and regional, country, family and species and acoustic references. Scientific, French and English indexes comprise the remainder of the book.

Weighing in at a rather hefty 2 kg, this is one feature of the book I fear many birders will find frustrating, if attempting to travel light. It may well be too heavy for back-packing field use, something I hope the publishers will address at some stage. I personally feel that it could potentially be produced as two softbacks, a plate section

for field purposes and the main text part for home/base-camp reference. I also hope that the cost doesn't prohibit resident African birders from obtaining a copy as I feel, for the first time, it is really possible for birders to identify the birds before them.

Both author and artist clearly possess extensive field experience over many years in western Africa. Their knowledge, expertise and sheer enthusiasm really does shine through. This is a really outstanding guide to one of the world's most exciting birding areas, and both Borrow and Demeý can be justly proud to have completed a task many thought impossible. I congratulate them both on a job exceptionally well done. This is an indispensable guide and I have no hesitation in recommending anyone who has been to, or is considering a visit to the region to obtain a copy now; you will not be disappointed.

Mark Andrews

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## Pheasants, Partridges and Grouse: A Guide to the Pheasants, Partridges, Quails, Grouse, Guineafowl, Buttonquails, and Sandgrouse of the World

Steve Madge and Phil McGowan with Guy M. Kirwan. 2002. 488 pp, 72 colour plates. London, UK: Christopher Helm. Hardback. ISBN 0-7136-3966-0. UK£45.

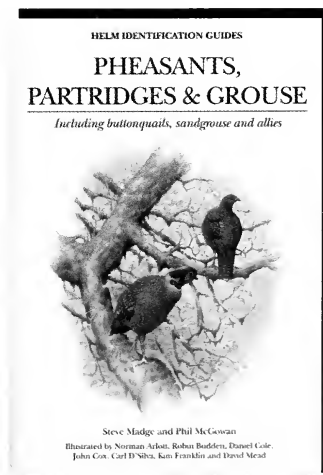
This addition to the Helm Identification Guide series covers 253 species of galliform bird, with full accounts given to a further four distinctive subspecies which the authors feel merit separate treatment. Some 67 of these taxa occur in the Afrotropical region, for which the species treatment adopted is largely conservative. They do, however, as one of the aforementioned four subspecies, treat the Kenya Crested Guineafowl *Guttera (pucherani) pucherani* separately from Crested Guineafowl *G. (p.) edouardi*, and state that, although usually considered conspecific, the two forms

overlap marginally in the East Rift Valley of Kenya, from where no intermediates are known.

The layout of the book will be familiar to those who own or have used others in this series. The introductory section in this volume is short to the point of being perfunctory—it occupies significantly less space than the seven pages of the contents or systematic list of species, which precede it. As such, it consists of little more than a glossary, four sketches of bird topography, an explanation of the layout of the book and some paragraphs on the gaps in our knowledge, and conservation.

The succeeding 72 colour plates are the work of seven different artists, which means that there is a wide range of styles on offer. Some appear rather old-fashioned, while others are much more pleasing to the modern eye; some come with a large amount of background detail, others are much more stark, showing only the bird; some depict several views of each species, with sexual differences and distinctive subspecies illustrated, perched and in flight, for others the illustration is of a single individual. I particularly like the buttonquails, whose rather maniacal facial expression the artist Kim Franklin has caught well. In this volume, the distribution maps are included with the plate legends on the facing page. They are therefore fairly small—about the size of the average African postage stamp.

The species accounts follow a shorter (2–3 sentences) or longer (up to a page) introduction to each genus. They are broken down into sections entitled identification, description, geographical variation (which includes details of subspecies), measurements, habitat, voice, habits, breeding, distribution, status and references. Strangely, however, the length



of these accounts varies considerably between groups. Thus, while *Turnix sylvatica* [here called Small Buttonquail, although larger in almost all measurements than Black-rumped Buttonquail *T. hottentota*, and not to be confused with Little Buttonquail *T. velox* of Australia...] receives nearly three pages of text and 11 references, most francolins fair very much worse, often with only one reference given, usually Urban *et al.*<sup>3</sup>. In many cases, the accounts appear little more than re-hashes of the *BoA* text. The text for the admittedly poorly known Finsch's Francolin *Francolinus finschi* amounts to fewer than 400 words and ends with, in addition to *BoA*, a reference to 'Jean 2000' which does not appear in the 26-page Bibliography section that closes the book. Even more conspicuous by their absence is any reference at all to Harrison *et al.*<sup>1</sup> or Little *et al.*<sup>2</sup>. The Democratic Republic of Congo is called Zaïre throughout.

Overall, the rather uneven treatment of this book is exemplified by the fact that two authors are credited on the front cover, with a third, the editor of this Bulletin no less, being added on the title page. This, plus the two separate lists of acknowledgements, leads one to infer this book has perhaps had a somewhat checkered history. Rather than speculate any further on that however, I shall instead try and find out the story behind the introduction of Erckel's Francolin *F. erckelii* into Hawaii. Thereby hangs a tale I feel sure.

Lincoln Fishpool

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2. Little, R., Crowe, T. and Barlow, S. 2000. *Gamebirds of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Struik.
3. Urban, E.K., Fry, C.H. and Keith, S. (eds) 1986. *The Birds of Africa*. Vol 2. London, UK: Academic Press.

## Toucans, Barbets and Honeyguides

Lester Short and Jennifer Horne, illustrated by Albert Earl Gilbert, 2001, 526 pp, 36 colour plates, 17 colour photographs, 132 distribution maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-854666-1. UK£60

This, the eighth volume in the *Bird Families of the World* series, covers three of the four families in the order Piciformes (the fourth being the woodpeckers) by two

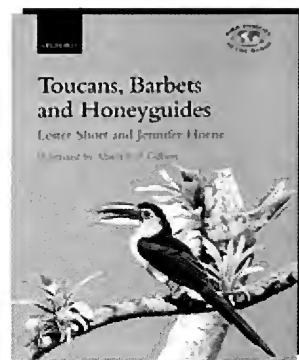
ornithologists who have a long-standing reputation of being *the* experts on the subject. Like its predecessors in the series, the book is divided in two parts. The first (112 pp) includes chapters on evolutionary relationships, distribution, habitats, morphology, behaviour, breeding biology and other aspects of the birds' life cycle. These are written in a colloquial style, devoid of jargon, and enlivened by some line drawings and black-and-white photographs depicting special features and aspects of behaviour. The photographs are rather dark but colour versions are, very usefully, reproduced in the colour plate section. One chapter is entirely devoted to the unique behavioural ecology of the wax-eating and brood parasitic honeyguides. The second part, the bulk of the book, contains the species accounts, ranging in length from one to seven pages per species (usually 2–3 pp) and including a distribution map. All species are illustrated in 36 colour plates. Twenty-nine pages of references, updated until 1997, attest to the authors' thoroughness.

Of the 133 species treated, 56 occur in the ABC region: 41 barbets (exactly half of the total of 82) and 15 (of the 17) honeyguides (the toucans, with which we will not concern ourselves here, number 34 species). Seven of the 13 barbet genera are Afrotropical, compared to three genera each from tropical Asia and America. The barbets have sometimes been split into three families, one for each of the continents on which they occur, with Afrotropical species grouped in Lybiidae (cf. Sibley & Monroe<sup>6</sup>). This, however, is considered ill-advised by Short and Horne, as there is no evidence that any geographical grouping would link closest relatives. Compared with the treatment of barbets and honeyguides, by the same researchers, in *Birds of Africa (BoA)*<sup>3</sup>, there are no taxonomic changes, although the sequence in both families is different. Thus, instead of being last, the *Trachyphonus* barbets are now placed first, before *Gymnobucco*, whereas Lyre-tailed Honeyguide is now placed at the end of its family, after the *Indicator* species, the order of which has been reversed, with small species appearing first and Greater Honeyguide last.

The forest-dwelling Yellow-billed Barbet is maintained in *Trachyphonus*, although authorities such as Bannerman, Bates, Chapin and Mackworth-Præd & Grant included it within the monospecific *Trachylaemus*, to differentiate it from open-country social species in *Trachyphonus*, which differ from it in plumage, behaviour and vocalisations, a treatment that has been followed by recent Western and East

African identification guides. According to Short and Horne, however, it is connected with the ground barbets by Crested Barbet *T. vaillantii*, which they consider to be intermediate. Lesser *Indicator minor* and Thick-billed Honeyguides *I. conirostris* are treated as species, although the case for their separation, mainly based on different habitats and a small area of 'overlap' in W Uganda, seems debatable. Their vocalisations are identical and the different forms are so similar in appearance, with colour and size variations within subspecies, that the authors admit that they probably interbreed in Nigeria (and elsewhere?) and that ssp. *ussheri*, included in *I. conirostris*, may actually be a race of *I. minor*. No wonder many field workers are highly sceptical of this split and prefer to consider the forms as belonging to a single species, as they have been in the past, by White<sup>7</sup> and Mackworth-Præd & Grant<sup>8</sup> and, more recently, by Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire<sup>2</sup> and Chappuis<sup>9</sup>.

The species accounts are packed with information that updates *BoA* and with, thankfully, better referenced data. The authors state that the vocal repertoire of few barbet species has been studied thoroughly and that much remains to be learned. This comes as a surprise, as their far-carrying, repetitive songs uttered all-day long must rank among the most typical sounds of African forests and woodlands. It is fascinating to read how the habit of eating wax or cerophagy has led the honeyguides to a number of adaptations including of digestion, morphology and co-evolution with bees and man. Interestingly, the limited availability of wax also often results in concentrations of these normally solitary, aggressive birds at a food source, where there appears to be an inter- and intraspecific dominance hierarchy with, remarkably, immatures dominant over adults, and females over males. Immature Greater Honeyguides *Indicator indicator* are dominant over all others. The 'guiding' that gave honeyguides their name likely



arose comparatively recently, and whereas in *BoA* the authors state that two species lead humans and other mammals to bees' nests, subsequent field work has led them to believe that only the Greater Honeyguide actually 'guides', and apparently only humans. Rather disappointingly, they now also consider unlikely tales of Ratels *Mellivora capensis* being guided. A minor point of criticism is that the authors appear to have reversed their, in my view laudable, decision, in *BoA*, to call the three distinctive, fine-billed *Prodotiscus* species honeybirds. These names are now being widely used and changing them back to 'honeyguide' does not contribute to the acceptance of standardised vernacular names.

Producing accurate distribution maps is an almost impossible task, in which the authors nevertheless appear to have largely succeeded. Only one map puzzled me: that for the little-known, central African Sladen's Barbet which, curiously, has a '?' in southern Mali and a 'x' in Somalia or Ethiopia. No explanation is given for these highly improbable, not to say impossible, records. Unfortunately, the maps do not indicate country borders, which makes them rather difficult to interpret. That they could be improved upon is shown by Kemp's Hornbills monograph, the first volume of the series, in which the maps are larger and do indicate country borders.

The plates, of which only eight depict Afrotropical species, are generally accurate and artistically pleasing, although in a few of the Asian and American species leaves and branches are slightly too prominent for my taste. They are particularly useful as they illustrate many subspecies: 107 birds (of 56 species) have been depicted, against 88 in *BoA*. It is, however, a pity that the birds of the first honeyguide plate are not all depicted to the same scale; although this is indicated on the facing page, it remains confusing, especially as this is a difficult group.

Editorial errors, apparently inevitable, are few, the most conspicuous being that the space for the distribution map of Chaplin's Barbet (p. 198), is taken by a duplicate map of Yellow-billed Barbet, which, according to the caption, should have been a figure of a Chaplin's Barbet clinging to its nest entrance.

Considering the rather high price of the book and the fact that the acclaimed *Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW)*<sup>4</sup> has since published the chapters on these families, by the same authors, one may wonder whether it is worth the investment. Let there be no misunderstanding: *HBW* is a, admittedly splendid, summary. This work, the result of some 25 years of

research by both authors, is the real thing. It is therefore essential to anyone, scientist or amateur, seriously interested in these attractive and intriguing families. Authors and publisher are to be congratulated for this authoritative monograph.

Ron Demeij

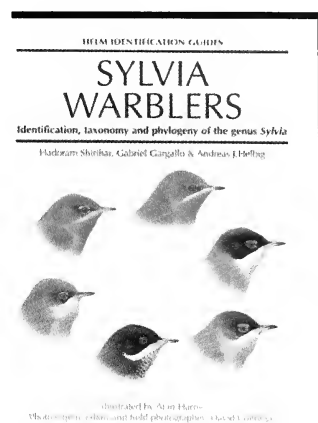
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## Sylvia Warblers: Identification, Taxonomy and Phylogeny of the Genus *Sylvia*

Hadoram Shirihai, Gabriel Gargallo and Andreas J. Helbig, illustrated by Alan Harris, photographic editor and field photographer, David Cottridge, distribution maps by C.S. Roselaar, edited by Guy M. Kirwan and Lars Svensson. 2001. London, UK: Christopher Helm. 576 pp, 20 colour plates, 97 pp of colour photographs, many colour maps, line drawings and sonograms. UK£60.

Natural history gradually moved into the domain of academics once the Linnaean systematic approach had become generally accepted, but it remained the enthusiasm and obsession of countless amateurs, whether well educated or not, simply because detailed observation continued to reveal seemingly endless aspects of animal behaviour and ecology. Today's consumer society and its concomitant technological advances have created a world of hobbies and interests so vast that natural history is



often seen as no more than yet another 'specialist activity'. The flood of natural history books and videos in the 21st century paradoxically has seen the demise of the general naturalist and the rise of the specialist, who appears in many guises. We now have huge numbers of biologists (a few of whom are ornithologists) whose worthy papers are incomprehensible to the non-scientist or non-mathematician, and we have huge numbers of birders whose views (if we can accept the content of birding magazines at somewhere near face value) seem limited to compiling lists to arcane and artificial criteria.

Books and magazines produced for birders are often dismissed out of hand by academics as trivial. Of course, there have been many books, such as the Poyser series, that have sought to address the gap between science and birdwatching, but sales have been diminishing. Over the years, I have been encouraged by the publication of 'advanced' books on bird families or groups but their treatment of conservation, taxonomy and biology has been uneven and uncertain to say the least. What was needed was a book that could be regarded as the standard that others must meet; *Sylvia Warblers* does so, and handsomely.

There is one prime reason for that success; the team who produced it have the ideal, multi-disciplinary balance. They have the field knowledge to cover all the species across the genus' broad distribution; they have intimate knowledge of molecular genetic analysis techniques, research results and their import; they include a superb bird artist and a wonderfully gifted bird photographer; their mapmaker probably knows more about bird distributions across Eurasia than anyone else, and their editorial duo combine excellent field recognition and in-the-hand skills.

The tone is set in the authors', artist's and photographer's prefaces, for these make plain that enormous patience and application, though essential, must be set in the context of their love for the subject, birds. In *Sylvia Warblers*, the illustrations inspire the mind and impart knowledge to an equal degree. However, it is because the book's text is articulate (For once, let's praise the editors for their often unacknowledged work) that the non-scientist reader can follow the concisely-phrased technical issues; for example the lucid 'Characteristics of the Genus' chapter certainly taxes the brain (as it should), but not because it is turgid! The species descriptions, as always, use a shorthand phrasing that is clear and self-consistent, the component headings being Introduction, Field Identification (very detailed), Voice, Identification in the Hand, Allospecies and Subspecies Taxonomy (where appropriate, which may be more often than you might expect, given the findings during the research for the book), Moults, Age and Sex, General Biology and Ecology, Population Size and Trends, and an Appendix that contains an extensive summary of biometric data. The ease with which the sections can be read whets the appetite for more.

Those with an interest in the *Sylvia* genus will want to read first about their favourite aspect. For me, subsuming the *Parisoma* genus into *Sylvia* on the grounds of morphology, behaviour, vocalisations and mitochondrial DNA sequences is a convincing argument, particularly when the detailed analysis of this evidence reveals that two '*Parisoma*' species, Brown *Sylvia* *S. lugens* and Yemen Warbler *S. buryi* derive from the Orphee *S. hortensis*! Arabian Warbler *S. leucomelaena* group, but the other three, Banded *Sylvia* *S. boehmi*, Layard's Warbler *S. layardi* and Chestnut-vented Warbler *S. subcaeruleum*, have no close relatives in the genus, although Barred Warbler *S. nisoria* probably is their nearest relative. Certainly, the calls I have heard and the curiosity I have seen from *layardi* and *subcaeruleum* brought *Sylvia* irresistibly to mind!

The book is a hugely complex undertaking, and it is unavoidable that keen-eyed and knowledgeable reviewers have found points (including production errors) to criticise. However, I think it is more important to try to assess the book in the context of what it sets out to achieve. Accordingly, before writing this review, I listened to many views from birder and professional ornithologist alike. There is

but a single complaint, the purchase price of UK£60, but there is general recognition that this is probably a realistic reflection of the outstanding quality of the diagrams, maps and photographs. Even today, UK£60 appears to be a figure that many baulk at (and before you ask, yes, I did buy a copy before I was invited to review it!), given that their budgets often have to cover long-running and expensive series, such as *The Birds of Africa* and *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. However, the chief response to the book was one of unanimous praise. Unfortunately, the standards that *Sylvia Warblers* sets are unlikely to be matched often, because the bird-book publishing world has undergone several major upheavals lately, Pica being taken over by A. & C. Black, Poyser stock being largely sold off to A. & C. Black, Oxford University Press rationalising its titles, and large price increases being in the pipeline.

If you have a fascination for warblers, then buy this book. If you are a birder, refine your skills while appreciating the scientific context, and if you are a scientist, marvel at the contribution that observation has played. If you are both, appreciation of the photography and artwork should be more than enough excuse! ?

Mike Blair

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# The jizz of doves in the Sahel, and how to remember their calls

Joost Brouwer

Une courte description est donnée des espèces de Colombidés habitant le Sahel, et notamment de leur apparence générale et leur aspect à l'envol. Une transcription aide-mémoire des vocalisations est présentée, en anglais et en français.

Confused by all those different turtle doves in the Sahel, and by their calls? I certainly was when I first went to live in Niamey, the capital of Niger. And this despite owning the relevant volume of *The Birds of Africa*<sup>5</sup>, as well as various field guides. However, my flight identification skills were sharpened while driving 40 km of dirt road to work each day, with doves constantly flying up in front of the car. And after systematically checking each confusing cooing in the bush, I found that many species just call their own name, after a fashion, in English or Latin, and sometimes in French as well. Try the call descriptions below, summarised in Table 1, and see whether they work in your part of the Sahel. You can also compare them with the CDs of Chappuis<sup>3</sup>, though I used his records<sup>2</sup>. Call syllables that are emphasised are presented in capitals. Just as in Borrow & Demey<sup>1</sup>, a hyphen '-' indicates a very short pause, a space a normal pause as in ordinary conversation, a comma a longer pause (about one second), and several dots '...' a pause of more than two seconds. Plumage and jizz descriptions are based on my own observations, with some help originally from Serle *et al*<sup>4</sup> and *The Birds of Africa*<sup>5</sup>, and latterly from Borrow & Demey<sup>1</sup> and van Perlo<sup>6</sup>. General indications of distribution are from *The Birds of Africa*<sup>5</sup> and Borrow & Demey<sup>1</sup>. Suggestions for improvements are welcome, in particular for the French renditions of the calls.

## Larger turtle doves

The African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea* or Tourterelle rieuse is relatively large and solid as turtle doves in the Sahel go, and quite pale-coloured. As it flies off, its upperwing-coverts appear especially pale. It has white tail corners and a white underwing. It occurs in the arid Sahel, from Senegal and Mauritania to Eritrea and Somalia. In the southern part of its range, including around Niamey, it is much more frequent during the dry season than in the wet. Also known as Rose-grey Dove (as in its scientific name), it appears to call an emphatic 'ROSE, GRRRRREY', repeated every 2–3 to five seconds, with a clear pause between calls. Or 'ROSE, GRRRRIS' in French, if you prefer.

The African Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens* or Tourterelle pleureuse is also relatively large and heavily

built, but as it flies away it presents a much darker grey impression than the African Collared Dove. It has a red eye-ring like the Red-eyed Dove *S. semitorquata*, though more conspicuous, and it is not as dark brown as the latter. It also has white corners to the tail. It occurs throughout the Sahel and Sudan zones, and discontinuously in drier parts of eastern and southern Africa to the Limpopo, seldom far from water. In the Niamey area it is present all year, especially in areas with a water supply, such as irrigated gardens or near the river. One call is a rapidly reverberating 'I mou-ou-ou-ourn', or in French 'JE pleu-eu-eu-eure', repeated every four seconds. It can also call 'MOUR ning-DOVE' every two seconds ('PLEU reu-SE'). And, when it alights, it gives a call described by others as 'an excited treble gargle'<sup>5</sup> or 'a resonant quavering gargle'<sup>1</sup>. I cannot improve on these descriptions and am sure you will easily recognise the call, once you know which species it comes from.

Further south, and also quite large, is the Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* or Tourterelle à collier. It has a narrow red eye-ring, but unlike the previous species it is rather dark brownish grey on the back, including its shoulders. As it flies off you can also sometimes see the dark band close to the tip of the tail, which lacks white corners. It occurs in well-wooded areas throughout sub-Saharan Africa, including the Sudan and Guinea savanna zones of West Africa, but not in rain forest. Red-eyed Dove calls vary<sup>2</sup>, and can be rendered as 'I AM a-red-eyed-dove', 'I-am-a-RED-eyed-dove' or 'I'm-a-RED-eyed-dove', repeated every two seconds. The 'I-am' is sometimes omitted. In French this can be transcribed, with some imagination, as 'J'AI UN col-lier-er-er', 'J'ai-un-col-LIER-er-er' or 'un-col-LIER-er-er', with the 'J'ai-un' sometimes omitted.

## Medium-sized turtle doves

The European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* or Tourterelle des bois, is of medium size, quite elegant, and recognisable as it flies away by its rufous shoulders with dark centres to the feathers. It has a black-and-white streaked patch on the neck-side and clear white tail corners. It is exclusively a dry-season visitor throughout the Sahel and northern Sudan zones, though there are resident populations of the race *hoggara* in montane Niger and Chad. As its name indicates, it mainly migrates from

Europe to sub-Saharan Africa, with some individuals perhaps arriving from North Africa. It is generally recorded in small to very large flocks. Like the African Collared Dove, the European Turtle Dove, on its breeding grounds at least, calls its own scientific name, a soft and melodious, purring ‘turrurr turr-turrurr’, repeated every 2–3 seconds. There is some disagreement as to whether it calls at all while south of the Sahara<sup>1,5</sup>, but I am pretty certain I have heard it there.

The similar but rather darker, larger, heavier and less gregarious Adamawa Turtle Dove *Streptopelia hypopyrrha* or *Tourterelle de l’Adamoua* is known from Nigeria, north Cameroon and south-west Chad, but not from Niger. It is, however, more widespread in West Africa than previously thought, with recent observations from Senegal and The Gambia, and also from Togo<sup>1</sup>. It has a grey, not white, tip to the tail and a solid dark, not striped, neck patch. It has

a call similar to that of European Turtle Dove, but deeper, more grinding and less melodious.

Captions to plate on opposite page

Top row, left to right: Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer*, Black-billed Wood Dove *T. abyssinicus* and Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*.

Second row, left to right: Adamawa Turtle Dove *Streptopelia hypopyrrha*, Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* and European Turtle Dove *S. turtur*.

Third row, left to right: African Collared Dove *S. roseogrisea* (above and below) and Vinaceous Dove *S. vinacea* (above and below).

Bottom row, left to right: African Mourning Dove *S. decipiens* and Red-eyed Dove *S. semitorquata*.

Table 1. Summary of jizz and call mnemonics of Sahelian doves

Species	Jizz as it flies from road and other characteristics	Call, English	Call, French
<b>larger turtle doves</b>			
African Collared Dove	Large and solid; pale, also its shoulders; white corners to tail	‘ROSE, GRRRREY’ every 2– 5 seconds	‘ROSE, GRRRRIS’
African Mourning Dove	Large and solid; much darker grey; white corners to tail	‘I mou-ou-ou-ourn’ rapidly reverberating, every four seconds; ‘MOUR ning-DOVE’ every two seconds; a gargling call upon alighting	‘JE pleu-eu-eu-eu-er’ ‘PLEU reu-SE’
Red-eyed Dove	Large and solid; rather dark brownish grey; dark band across tail, which has no white corners	‘I AM a-red-eyed-dove’, ‘I-am-a-RED-eyed-dove’ or ‘I’m-a-RED-eyed-dove’, repeated every two seconds (the ‘I am’ sometimes omitted)	J’AI UN col-lier-er-er’, ‘J’ai-un-col-LIER-er-er’ or ‘un-col-LIER-er-er’ (the ‘J’ai un’ sometimes omitted)
<b>medium-sized turtle doves</b>			
European Turtle Dove	Medium size, quite elegant; rufous shoulders with dark centres to the feathers; clear white corners to tail	‘TURRR turr-TURRR’ soft, melodious, purring; every 2–3 seconds	‘TURRR turr-TURRR’
Adamawa Turtle Dove	Larger, heavier and darker than European Turtle Dove; grey corners to tail	‘TURRR turr-TURRR’ deeper, more grinding and less melodious than European	‘TURRR turr-TURRR’
<b>small turtle doves</b>			
Vinaceous Dove	Small; rather pale, fairly evenly grey-brown on back with dark flight feathers; large white corners to tail	‘NACE-ous-dove’, sometimes ‘NACE-ous’ every second or faster, seemingly for minutes on end	‘VIN-eu-se’, sometimes ‘VIN-eu’
Laughing Dove	Small, somewhat longer tailed; quite brown on back and shoulders, with bluish-grey greater coverts and dark flight feathers; white corners to tail	‘i-AM a-LAUGH-ing-dove’ or ‘i-AM a-LAU-ugh-ing-dove’ every three seconds or so	‘je-SUIS mail-ÉE-ée-ée’ or ‘je-SUIS mail-ÉE-ée-ée-ée’
<b>other small doves</b>			
Namaqua Dove	Slight, slim and long-tailed; rufous primaries and underwings; male has a black face mask	‘na MAAA qua’ or ‘na MAAA’ soft (especially the first syllable), relaxed, every three seconds or so	‘na MAAA qua’ or ‘na MAAA’
Black-billed Wood Dove	Very small; rufous flight feathers and short black tail; drier savanna; black bill	hesitantly starting and slowly accelerating series of calls, with diagnostic three-syllable ‘BLACK-a-BILL...BLACK-a-BILL’ in the middle	three-syllable ‘AB-ys-SINE’ in the middle of a slowly accelerating series of calls
Red-billed Wood Dove	Very small; rufous flight feathers and short black tail; moister woodland; red-and-yellow bill	hesitantly starting and slowly accelerating series of calls, without a three-syllable phrase in the middle	no three-syllable phrase in the middle



## Small turtle doves

Of the small turtle doves, **Vinaceous Dove** *Streptopelia vinacea* or **Tourterelle vineuse** is rather pale and fairly evenly grey-brown on the back, with dark flight feathers and large white corners to the tail. It occurs throughout the northern tropics of Africa, between the Sahara and the rain forest, from the Atlantic to 40°E. Vinaceous Dove is present year-round in the Niamey area and calls a monotonous 'NACE-ous-dove NACE-ous-dove NACE-ous-dove', repeated every second or faster, seemingly for minutes on end. Sometimes it drops the dove and just calls 'NACE-ous', twice per second. In French it calls 'VIN-eu-se VIN-eu-se VIN-eu-se', and sometimes 'VIN-eu VIN-eu VIN-eu'. It is often audible on the soundtracks of television documentaries from the Sahel.

And finally there is the quite small, but somewhat longer tailed **Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* or **Tourterelle maillée**. It is rather brown on the back and shoulders, with bluish-grey greater coverts and dark flight feathers, and white corners to the tail. It is the only species considered here that has a rufous necklace with black speckles. It occurs virtually throughout sub-Saharan Africa, except the very dry and the very wet regions, never very far from water and often near human settlements. Laughing Dove calls 'i-AM a-LAUGH-ing-dove' or 'i-AM a-LAU-augh-ing-dove' every three seconds or so. In French 'je-SUIS maill-ÉE-ée-ée' or 'je-SUIS maill-ÉE-ée-ée-ée'.

## Other small doves

Several other small doves may also be found on Sahelian roads and in the Sahelian bush. The Namaqua (Long-tailed) Dove *Oena capensis* or **Tourterelle à masque de fer**, is instantly recognisable by its long tail and slight, slim build, as well as its rufous primaries and underwing. It is the only dove in the Sahel to exhibit clear sexual dimorphism: only males possess the beautiful black facial mask. It is common and widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, excluding rainforest areas. Namaqua Dove calls a soft (especially the first syllable) and relaxed 'na MAAA qua' or 'na MAAA' every three seconds or so.

The **Black-billed Wood Dove** *Turtur abyssinicus* or **Tourtelette d'Abyssinie**, is very small, and when flushed exhibits rufous flight feathers and a short tail that appears all black. In flight, when the different bill colour and wing-spot colour (dark blue rather than amethyst-blue) cannot be seen, it is virtually indistinguishable from Red-billed Wood Dove, though Black-billed is reportedly greyer and paler<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Black-billed Wood Dove occurs in drier Sahelian and Sudanian savannas, from Senegal to Eritrea, and south to the Gulf of Guinea in the Dahomey Gap. Red-billed Wood Dove is more a forest-zone bird,

though there is overlap in their distributions. In Ethiopia and Uganda confusion with the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove or Tourtelette émeraude *Turtur chalcospilos* is also possible<sup>5</sup>. Black-billed Wood Dove's call is a hesitantly starting 'BLACK... BILL...BLACK...BILL', gradually accelerating to 'BLACK BILL...BLACK BILL' and then a diagnostic three-syllable 'BLACK-a-BILL...BLACK-a-BILL', to finish with a fast 'BLACK-BLACK-BLACK', two or three syllables per second. In French 'AB...BYS...AB...BYS' then 'AB BYS...AB BYS' and 'AB-ys-SINE...AB-ys-SINE' and finally 'AB-AB-AB'.

One hundred kilometres south of Niamey, in the Sudanian zone, it is also possible to encounter **Red-billed Wood Dove** *Turtur afer* or **Tourtelette améthystine**. In flight, when its amethyst-blue wing-spots (rather than dark blue) and red-and-yellow bill cannot be seen, it is generally indistinguishable from Black-billed Wood Dove, which has the same rufous flight feathers and short black tail. Red-billed perhaps presents a somewhat darker and browner overall impression. It is also more of a forest-zone species, occurring throughout Africa between 10°N and 15°S, except in most of East Africa. The call of Red-billed Wood Dove is similar to that of Black-billed, hesitantly starting 'BLUE SPOT BLUE SPOT' (one syllable per second), gradually accelerating to a final 2–3 'SPOT's per second, without any three-syllable phrase in the middle.

## Acknowledgements

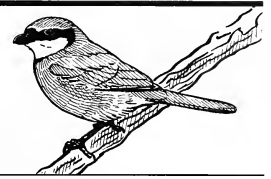
The plate by Nik Borrow is much appreciated. I am also grateful for the constructive comments on an earlier version of this contribution, especially by Ron Demey and also by Lincoln Fishpool and Guy Kirwan. ♀

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## Three new species for Seychelles: Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* and Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Adrian Skerrett

L'auteur rapporte les premières mentions de trois espèces pour les Seychelles. Un Vanneau sociable *Vanellus gregarius* était présent à Alphonse approximativement du 12 novembre 2001 au 15 mars 2002. Ceci constitue la première observation de cette espèce pour l'hémisphère Sud. Un Chevalier arlequin *Tringa erythropus* en plumage internuptial a été observé à Providence, Mahé, le 17 décembre 2000 et un Pouillot véloce *Phylloscopus collybita* à Alphonse, le 27 décembre 2001.

### Sociable Lapwing

When the plane landed on Alphonse airstrip on 22 December 2001, I watched from the window as waders, including Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and sand plovers *Charadrius* sp, took flight. Among these, a bird with black-and-white wings immediately stood out. After landing, I soon located it in grass at the side of the airstrip. After initial uncertainty—the bird not figuring in the Seychelles field guide<sup>5</sup>—identification as Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was eventually clinched using *Shorebirds*<sup>2</sup>. I observed it repeatedly over the course of the next few days until 26 December. I also established that the bird had arrived around 12 November 2001, and was subsequently informed that it remained until around 15 March 2002 (F Payet pers comm). My field notes include the following.

A medium-sized wader, in structure and appearance between a plover *Pluvialis* and a lapwing *Vanellus*. Always appeared noticeably larger than a nearby Grey Plover *P. squatarola*, though *Shorebirds* indicates the two are of similar size<sup>2</sup>. Size difference accentuated when standing erect, as it often did when approached, with a profile similar to a courser *Cursorius*, appearing somewhat more slender than Grey Plover and significantly longer necked. Feeding action typically plover-like, consisting of a short rapid run interrupted by an abrupt stop, followed by a 'frozen' pause or a peck at the ground.

The most distinctive feature was the broad white supercilium, narrowing behind the eye to meet at the nape in a downward-pointing V and outlined by a black loreal line and eyestripe. Crown grey-brown. Throat off-white with a faint greyish wash. Face-sides dirty pale yellow-buff. Upperparts grey-brown; some very faint, slightly paler feather edges apparent in early-morning light. Black

primaries visible at rest, forming a broad black line at edge of wing; black subterminal band to tail also visible. Breast pale grey-brown (much paler than upperparts) with lines of darker streaks. Belly white. Bill short and black. Legs fairly long, appearing black in strong sunlight, but dark grey in early-morning light. In flight, had broad wings with striking jet black primaries and pure white secondaries, contrasting with grey-brown mantle and wing-coverts. Pure white underwing-coverts. Tail white at edges with broad black band in centre, decreasing in width towards outer tail. Feet projected beyond tail.

Tentatively aged as a first-winter due to its uniform dark upperparts, indeterminate crown and clearly flecked breast.

The Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) has accepted this as the first record for Seychelles, which makes it also the first south of the equator (Alphonse lies at 07°S). The species is listed as Vulnerable and declining with probably fewer than 10,000 mature individuals<sup>1</sup>. It breeds in southern Russia and Kazakhstan, wintering south to the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan and north-west India. It has been recorded as a vagrant west to Spain and south to Sri Lanka (two records), the Maldives and northern Somalia.

### Spotted Redshank

On 17 December 2000, while birdwatching along the east coast of Mahé, I decided to visit some temporary pools on reclaimed land opposite the Gondwana Granite factory, Providence. Upon arrival, I spotted a medium-sized wader walking in shallow water, which stood out by virtue of its long orange-red legs. It was similar in size and structure to a nearby Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. Leg colour, however, indicated either Common Redshank *T. totanus* or Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, while the long



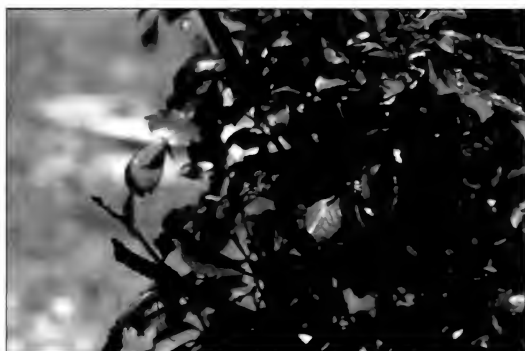
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Figures 1–2. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Alphonse, Seychelles, December 2001 (Adrian Skerrett)

Figure 3. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Mahé, Seychelles, December 2000 (Adrian Skerrett)

Figures 4–5. Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Alphonse, Seychelles, January 2001 (Adrian Skerrett)

tibia visible above the waterline suggested the latter. I telephoned Gerard Rocamora and Ron Gerlach for information on different plumages of Spotted Redshank, using *Shorebirds*<sup>2</sup>. When GR arrived with a telescope, we observed the bird at closer range and concluded that it was indeed a Spotted Redshank in non-breeding plumage, but were unable to determine whether it was an adult or an immature.

The black bill had the basal half of the lower mandible red and was longer and more slender than that of a Common Redshank. The jet black lores outlined a clear white supercilium, particularly striking when the bird was observed head-on. Upperparts were uniform grey-brown, browner than Common Greenshank, with many feathers

narrowly edged white. Underparts were white, with a grey wash and some pale streaks to the breast-sides, becoming grey bars on the lower flanks. In flight, it was immediately evident that the bird was not a Common Redshank, given the absence of the striking all-white secondaries of that species. Uppervings appeared mainly uniform grey-brown with white fringes to feathers evident.

The SBRC has accepted this as the first record for Seychelles. There has also been just one record of Common Redshank, in 1972<sup>4</sup>. Spotted Redshank breeds from northern Scandinavia to north-east Asia, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the Mediterranean to south-east Asia. Wintering grounds are mainly between the equator and 30°N, but it is regular in small numbers south to Kenya and Tanzania, and a vagrant further south. As with this sighting, all southern African records are of single birds at inland locations<sup>3</sup>.

## Chiffchaff

At 13.00 hrs on 27 January 2001, as I bicycled through the Alphonse Island Resort grounds, a warbler flew up from the

pathway to perch in a low bush. After I had stopped, it flew back down to the grass to feed. Migrant warblers are extreme rarities in Seychelles and need to be checked thoroughly. As I had no binoculars, paper, pen or camera with me, I decided to go back for these. When I returned, the bird was still there.

It was a small, fairly slender *Phylloscopus* with a clean appearance and a long, pale yellow supercilium prominent in front and behind the eye. Upperparts were pale brown; underparts whitish with a trace of yellow on the chin and throat. This initially suggested Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. However, the plain dark ear-coverts, prominent lower white eye crescent and dark legs pointed to Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. Northern and eastern races (eg *abietinus*) can have a prominent supercilium and a rather clean appearance. The bird fed in a rather restless manner, persistently flicking its wings and dipping its tail. This behaviour is unlike that of Willow Warbler, which usually gives only one desultory dip to the tail after alighting or none at all. From photos subsequently examined by the SBRC, the primary projection was measured as 7–10 mm, with the tertial length 15–18 mm (39–67%). For Willow Warbler, the percentage would be 75–100%.

The SBRC has accepted this as the first record of Chiffchaff for Seychelles. Race was left undetermined, though the most likely appears to be *abietinus* (Scandinavian Chiffchaff), which has a more obvious supercilium and is more grey-brown above and paler below than the nominate. Nominate *collybita* breeds in western Europe east to Poland merging with *abietinus*, which breeds in Scandinavia and western Russia, and *tristis* (Siberian Chiffchaff), which breeds in Russia from the Pechora basin east. All three races

are migratory, wintering from sub-Saharan tropical Africa and Arabia to northern India. *P. c. abietinus* is the race found in East Africa<sup>6</sup>.

There have been three previous records in Seychelles of Willow Warbler and two of indeterminate Willow Warbler / Chiffchaff. Other records of migrant warblers in the country include Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (one), Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* (one), Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (two), Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (one) and Common Whitethroat *S. communis* (one); just 11 records involving seven species, indicating that a warbler crossing the Indian Ocean to reach Seychelles is a rare, or at least an under-recorded, event.

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## Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis*, new to Benin

Patrick M. Claffey

Le 1er juillet 2002, un mâle *Anomalospiza* (Tisserin) parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis* a été observé dans le sud du Bénin, le long de la route Cotonou–Lomé. Ceci constitue la première mention pour le pays.

**P**arasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis* is described as a 'very local and patchily distributed, uncommon to rare resident' throughout its West African range<sup>1</sup>. There are no published records for Benin: it is not mentioned in Dowsett's country list<sup>3</sup>, nor in later publications documenting additional species. It has, however, been recorded in Togo and Nigeria<sup>2,4</sup>.

On 1 July 2002, along the main Cotonou–Lomé road, 9 km east of the Mono River, in south Benin (06°28'N 01°82'E), I observed a small, rather weaver-like bird, which I identified as a male Parasitic Weaver. It was perched in an area of flooded grassland and had a striking yellow head and underparts, a deep-based black bill and lightly streaked flanks. It held its bill open, but remained silent. I was able

to observe it in detail and for several minutes, at a distance of c3 m, from an overhead bridge.

Parasitic Weaver is known to parasitise cisticolas, prinias and other small passerines<sup>1</sup>, all of which were observed in the area. Given its small size, the male's distinctive plumage, and habitat, confusion with other species is most unlikely. Considering its status in West Africa, it is an interesting addition to the Benin list, although, given its occurrence in neighbouring countries, its presence was to be expected.

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## The first Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* for Madagascar

*Richard Patient*

L'auteur rapporte l'observation d'un Bécasseau à queue pointue *Calidris acuminata* à Toliara, dans le sud-ouest de Madagascar, le 10 novembre 1999. Il s'agit de la première mention pour le pays. L'espèce niche dans le nord-est de la Sibérie et hiverne au sud de l'équateur dans les îles du Pacifique occidental, en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande. Des occasionnels ont été signalés aux Seychelles, mais pas en Afrique continentale.

On the afternoon of 10 November 1999 I was birdwatching with Cliff Waller and others at lagoons near Toliara airport, south-west Madagascar. The vast majority of waders present were Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, of which there were at least 800. These were all in winter plumage, presenting a remarkably uniform, plain grey appearance. When I found a scaly brown wader among them, I was immediately intrigued. Although initially observed from the rear, size, structure and plumage features swiftly eliminated Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and I knew it was either a Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* or a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*. I have extensive field experience of the former from the UK and the Americas, but not of the latter, although I was aware of its features, the species being a very rare vagrant to the UK. As the bird exhibited a number of characters I would not associate with Pectoral Sandpiper (see below), I felt it had to be a Sharp-tailed, a view reinforced when it revealed its lack of a pectoral band. CW, who has extensive field experience of this species, unequivocally proclaimed it to be a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. We studied the bird through 20–60 x 80 telescopes for the next 20 minutes at ranges down to 70 m and made the following notes.

### Description

Medium-sized sandpiper, slightly larger and more pot-bellied than accompanying Curlew Sandpipers, with primaries not projecting beyond tail. Similar to Pectoral Sandpiper, but looking more 'lanky-legged'. Head appeared relatively small and flat crowned, with a neat chestnut cap streaked darker and contrasting with a bold whitish supercilium, which clearly extended behind the eye. Upperparts largely brown; feathers with white fringes contrasting with darker centres, creating a distinctly scaly appearance. Throat white. Breast washed pale peach, lacking

obvious dark markings except for a few brown streaks at the sides. Rest of underparts white. Bill relatively short and slightly decurved, tipped dark brown with paler, pinkish base at least to lower mandible. Legs yellowish olive. In flight, showed a narrow white wingbar. Rump and uppertail pattern typically calidrid, with blackish central band separating white sides. No call heard.

### Identification

Identified as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and differentiated from Pectoral Sandpiper by the combination of chestnut cap, conspicuous broad supercilium clearly extending behind the eye, lack of clear-cut band of streaks across the breast (streaks restricted to sides), peach wash to the breast and subtle differences in shape (longer legged, pot-bellied and smaller headed)<sup>1,2</sup>. The white upperparts fringing combined with the peach breast coloration suggest it was a first-year moulting into winter plumage.

### Status and distribution

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds in north-eastern Siberia, leaving its breeding grounds in July–September to winter south of the equator on islands in the western Pacific and in Australia and New Zealand<sup>1,3</sup>. Vagrants have been reported from Seychelles (October–February and July)<sup>5</sup>, but not from mainland Africa<sup>6</sup>. It is not included in the most recent work on the birds of Madagascar<sup>4</sup> and this record appears to be the first for the island.

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## Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala*, new to Togo

Gavin Selfe

L'auteur rapporte la découverte de la Bouscarle caqueteuse *Bradypterus baboecala* c10 km au nord de Lomé, Togo, le 9 juin 2002. Ceci constitue la première mention pour le pays et également la plus occidentale en Afrique de l'Ouest, l'espèce n'ayant été observée auparavant que jusqu'à Onitsha, au Nigéria. L'oiseau a été vu et son chant entendu à plusieurs reprises, la dernière fois le 28 juillet.

On 9 June 2002, at c09.30 hrs, I observed a Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* in a large swamp c10 km north of Lomé, Togo (c06°13'N 01°16'E). The bird was uttering its characteristic song, consisting of an initially slow, then accelerating series of dry *truk... truk truk...* notes stopping abruptly, while displaying low above the vegetation with spread tail pointing down. I watched it for c30 minutes under good light conditions (sunny weather with some clouds), approaching it to c10 m, and obtained good views while it perched low on reed stems, noticing in particular its whitish underparts with streaked chest and strongly graduated, faintly and narrowly barred tail. The site consists of a large swampy area along the Zio River, just before it reaches Lake Togo. The swamp has some islands of slightly higher, solid ground with several large trees. During subsequent visits to the site, I heard the species several more times, the last during my final visit in the morning of 28 July 2002. I know the song well from southern Africa.

This appears to be the first record of Little Rush Warbler in Togo; it is not mentioned in the most recent checklist for the country<sup>2</sup>. Although the species, which is also known under the alternative name of African Sedge Warbler, is widespread and locally common in eastern and southern Africa, it is a rare and local resident in western Africa, where it has only been recorded with certainty from scattered localities west to Onitsha in Nigeria<sup>1,3,4</sup>. This record is therefore the westernmost to date, although there is a single, unconfirmed, claim of a singing bird from northern Côte d'Ivoire<sup>5</sup>. Little Rush Warbler may perhaps be more widespread than these scarce records suggest. Its secretive behaviour may cause it to be overlooked, although its distinctive, loud song, which is mainly uttered in the breeding season, during the rains, attracts attention<sup>4</sup>.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Ron Demey for assisting me with a draft of this note and Bob Dowsett for his comments. ☺

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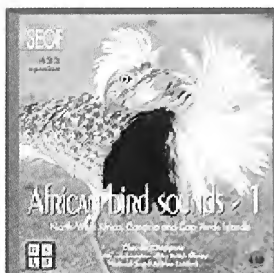
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# First conclusive evidence of breeding in Senegambia and parental behaviour of Black Coucal *Centropus grillii*

Clive R. Barlow

Le 22 décembre 2002, un couple de Coucals de Grill *Centropus grillii* avec deux jeunes a été observé près de Basse Santa Su en Gambie. Bien qu'on eût déjà observé certains comportements suggérant la nidification dans le pays, sa reproduction en Sénégambie n'avait pas encore été prouvée. Les parents étaient toujours en plumage juvénile, ce qui indique pour la première fois que le Coucal de Grill peut se reproduire avec succès à ce stade. Il s'agissait d'un couple monogame et il n'était donc pas question de polyandrie, comme c'est souvent le cas chez cette espèce. Le stade de développement des jeunes suggère que la ponte avait eu lieu à la fin octobre, que les œufs avaient éclos début novembre et que les jeunes avaient quitté le nid début décembre.

There are no complete breeding records for Black Coucal *Centropus grillii* from Senegambia. It is suggested to be a wet-season breeding visitor to The Gambia in August–late November, where it has been observed copulating, mate-feeding and carrying nest material<sup>1,3</sup>. The few observations indicating breeding have all been made in the peak rains, ie during August to mid-September.

## Observations

At 10.30 hrs on 22 December 2002, CRB and a small group of birdwatchers were in the Prufu Swamp area, just east of Basse Santa Su (13°19'N 14°12'W) in the Upper River Division of The Gambia. While watching a large expanse of open rice fields with scattered bushes, two coucals in juvenile plumage<sup>2-4</sup> with tails about two-thirds grown and possessing obvious dull yellow gapes appeared from low, flattened vegetation 25 m in front of the group. The two juveniles, which exhibited similar stages of development, ascended and perched for short periods atop long, collapsed and tangled *Andropogon* grass stems, 10–15 m apart. Over a number of low short flights, their deportment was unsteady and lacked bearing, ie the typically awkward behaviour of young coucals.

Over c900 m<sup>2</sup> of muddy overgrown rice paddy, the fledglings loosely associated with two adults that were largely black below with some pale barring, plumage associated either with post-breeding moult or an incomplete black first-year breeding condition. Their wings and tail were wholly barred, strong indication of retained juvenile feathering<sup>3,4</sup>. The adult flight pattern was direct with open-winged flaps and glides to grass and rice stems and low fence posts.

Over a 45-minute period, despite remaining in close proximity, the adults were not observed to feed the young, and no vocalisation from any of the four birds was heard. Sound-recordings of adult Black Coucal have been made in

The Gambia in October–November in Central River Division<sup>1</sup>.

Elsewhere in West Africa, Black Coucal breeds in northern Ghana in July–August, in coastal Ghana in April–July and in northern Nigeria in July–August<sup>6</sup>. Photographs of the adults and juveniles were sent to R B Payne, who estimated fledging date, based on tail length, as 1 December. The incubation period in the species is known to be 14–16 days and fledging occurs at 18–20 days<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, in this instance, egg laying was in late October, hatching in early November and fledging in very early December.

## Discussion

This observation of Black Coucal involving two adults with fledglings suggests that both parents tended the young. Therefore, in this case, a system of monogamy and biparental care, and not polyandry as is often cited for the species<sup>7</sup>, was employed. The plumage of both 'adults' was that of first-year birds<sup>3,4</sup>, making this the first confirmation that Black Coucal can successfully breed at this age (R B Payne *in litt.*). Prufu Swamp lends itself as a suitable location for further work on the species' breeding ecology: the rice fields are suitably demarcated in quadrats, and observations in previous years have demonstrated that several birds use the site.

## Acknowledgements

Tim Norriss supplied the photographs and, along with Jenny Mallett and Alan & Juliet Bloss, supported CRB with field observations. Marie Ciss prepared the French summary. R. B. Payne made available currently unpublished texts and commented on a first draft. Nik Borrow and Chris Kehoe kindly provided information on sightings and plumages via the African Birding e-mail discussion group.





Figures 1–2. Juvenile Black Coucal *Centropus grillii*, Prufu Swamp, Upper River, The Gambia, 22 December 2002 (Tim Norriss)

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Captions to photos on facing page

Figure 1. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Iyve, Logone floodplain, Cameroon, 31 January 2001 (Ronald Messemaker)

Figure 2. Dwarf Bittern *Ixobrychus sturmii*, Erjos Ponds, Tenerife, Canary Islands, 23 August 2002 (Ludovic Scalabre)

Figure 3. Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus*, Gongoni salt pans, Malindi, Kenya, 7 October 2002 (Colin Jackson)

Figure 4. White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, Seawater Farms, Massawa, Eritrea (Jugal Tiwari)



# Recent Reports



1



2



3

These are largely unconfirmed records published for interest only; records are mostly from 2002, with a few from earlier dates. We thank all birders who have sent in their records and urge them to submit full details to the relevant national or regional organisations. It is suggested that observations of each species be compared with relevant literature to set new data in context and that observers who are unfamiliar with the status of birds in a particular country refer to R.J. Dowsett's (1993) *Afrotropical avifaunas*: annotated country checklists (in: R.J. Dowsett and F. Dowsett-Lemaire. *A Contribution to the Distribution and Taxonomy of Afrotropical and Malagasy Birds*. Tauraco Research Report 5. Liège: Tauraco Press) or more recent or appropriate sources before submitting records.

## Azores

Records from April 2002 include the following. A female Hooded Merganser *Mergus cucullatus* that had reportedly been present for several weeks was photographed at Lagoa Branca, Flores, on 4th, while less than 30 km from there, at Caldeirão Lake, Corvo, a male, the first for the Western Palearctic, was displaying on 8th. A Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was at Corvo on 5–8th. A pair of American Black Duck *Anas rubripes* stayed on Lagoa Branca, Flores, where breeding was reported in 2001; there were also at least four pure individuals at Caldeirão Lake, Corvo, on 8th, among more than eight possible hybrids (reportedly, 27 American Black Ducks were present here during 2001). Several Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* were displaying at various locations on Flores on 15–17th. First-winter Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis* were observed at Horta harbour, Faial, on 15th (one) and at Lagoa Rasa, Flores, on 16th (four). At the latter site, a



4

first-winter American Herring Gull *L. argentatus smithsonianus* was seen on the same day. A first-winter Iceland Gull *L. glaucoides* was (still) at Santa Cruz das Flores harbour on 5th. A Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* was tape-recorded at night on Ilhéu da Vila off Santa Maria on 12th; up to four have been present here in recent years (per TC, *Birding World* 15: 155 and *Dutch Birding* 24: 173–178).

The following records from the period October–November 2002 were received. A small influx of Double-crested Cormorants *Phalacrocorax auritus* included up to 11 at Santa Cruz, Flores, on 4 October, with three still there on 22nd and two on 23th, and three at Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, on 29th; six on Faial on 18th may have been part of the group on Flores. Single Lesser Scaups *Aythya affinis* were found at Lagoa Azul, Sete Cidades, São Miguel, on 29 October and at Cabo da Praia, Terceira, the next day (per TC). A variety of Nearctic species was reported in October, including American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, White-rumped Sandpiper *C. fuscicollis* (adult and juveniles), Baird's Sandpiper *C. bairdii*, Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus* and Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, all on Cabo da Praia, Terceira, and Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* on Lagoa Azul, São Miguel (LB). A juvenile Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*, on Terceira at Lagoa Ginjal on 21–26 October, would represent the first for the Azores. A Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* was in the north of São Miguel on 26 October. A Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, claimed from Lagoa Rasa, Flores, on 22 October, would represent the first for the Macaronesian islands. A Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* was claimed from Fajã Grande, Flores, on 1 November (per TC).

## Benin

A belated record from November 1999 concerns two Grey Pratincoles *Glareola cinerea* on the beach in front of the Sheraton Hotel, Cotonou (BB).

Additions to the Benin list in 2001 include Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Andropadus latirostris*, mist-netted in Pobé Forest, c3 km from the border with Nigeria, on 23 March and 1 June, Western Bearded Greenbul *Criniger barbatus*, caught on 29 September, and White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens* trapped on 30 March, 13 April and 15 September (MvdA).

## Botswana

A European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* was observed in the company of three Ring-necked (=Cape Turtle) Doves *S. capicola* near Tsaro Camp, Moremi National Park, on 7 June 2002; this would be the first for Botswana and the fourth for southern Africa, if accepted (TW).

## Burkina Faso

A field trip to the Réserve partielle du Sahel, in the extreme north of the country, on 7–11 June 2002, to search for Ostrich *Struthio camelus*, found no traces of this species, but made several interesting observations. Firsts for Burkina appear to be Barbary Falcon *Falco [peregrinus] peregrinoides* (one adult), Nubian Bustard *Neotis nuba* (one), Yellow-breasted Barbet *Trachyphonus margaritatus* (two) and Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* (up to 17). Other noteworthy species included c60 African Swallow-tailed Kites *Chelictinia riocourii*, a late, dark-morph Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Lake Oursi, two late Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni*, a remarkably high number of c1,200 Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* at Lake Oursi, a Quail-plover *Ortyxelos meiffrenii*, no fewer than 38 Arabian Bustards *Ardeotis arabs*, c20 Savile's Bustards *Eupodotis [ruficrista] savilei*, five White-bellied Bustards *E. senegalensis*, c90 Mottled Swifts *Tachymarptis aequatorialis*, five Kordofan Larks *Mirafra kordofanica*, two Desert Cisticolas *Cisticola aridulus*, six Cricket Warblers *Spiloptila clamans* and 19 Southern Grey Shrikes *Lanius meridionalis* (BP).

## Cameroon

In January 2001, several interesting species were recorded in the far north, among which four were new to the country. The most important was the discovery of a

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* photographed at Iyve, Logone floodplain, on 31st (Fig 1); this constitutes the first record in West Africa of the species, which winters mainly in Sudan and Eritrea. The first Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* for Cameroon was found dead at Mare Mdawe on 27th; also there were 15 dead Barn Owls *Tyto alba* and a dead Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. A Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* at Diequere, Waza National Park, on 31st and an Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* at Douing (11°05'N 14°58'E) on 30th, were the other additions to the country's list. A Jack Snipe *Lymnocyrtus minimus* was seen at Zilim on 22nd. Isabelline Wheatears *Oenanthe isabellina* proved very common in the Logone floodplain (RM).

Records from the period March–August 2002 include the following. Dwarf Bitterns *Ixobrychus sturmi* were surprisingly common in the (very wet) Waza area on 30 July–1 August, with several seen daily (VS). A melanistic Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* was a surprise find at Ngaoundaba, on 9 April. A breeding colony of Bristle-nosed Barbets *Gymnobucco pili* was found on Mt Kupe in March; this is apparently only the second record for the mountain, the previous being from 1995–96. A Willcock's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksi* responded aggressively to playback on Rengo Rock, Korup National Park, on 17 March; this apparently constitutes an addition to the park list (NB). From the vocal evidence of birds singing in March–April, River Prinia *Prinia fluvialis* appears to be the common prinia on the Waza floodplains (NB, CC & MM); perhaps previous researchers missed it because they were unfamiliar with the song. Two Cricket Warblers *Spiloptila clamans*, found north of Mora on 10 March, constitute the third record of this



Quail-plover *Ortyxelos meiffrenii* by Mark Andrews

species in the country; the previous two, from December 1996 and March 2001, were also from this area (CC & MM).

An early (or overwintering?) Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* was found at Waza on 30 July (VS). At Kodmin, in the Bakossi Mountains, a recently dead Mount Kupe Bush-shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* was found caught in a snare on the ground at 1,480 m, on 24 March (NB).

In May, exploration of the western slopes of the Bamboutos Mountains produced many montane species, among which Bannerman's Turaco *Turaco bannermani*, Banded Wattle-eye *Platysteira laticincta*, White-tailed Warbler *Poliolais lopezi* and Bannerman's Weaver *Ploceus bannermani* were most significant (per ML).

### Canary Islands

Records from the period March–November 2002 include the following. An exceptional 11 White-faced Storm-petrels *Pelagodroma marina* were seen between Tenerife and La Palma on 24 August, with another two between Tenerife and El Hierro on 25 August. A Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* was watched from the La Gomera to Tenerife ferry on 17 July. The fourth Dwarf Bittern *Ixobrychus sturmi* for the Canary Islands was photographed at Erjos Ponds, Tenerife, on 23 August (Fig 2), and remained until at least 25th; the three previous records were on Tenerife in 1889 or 1890 and in the 1970s (both collected) and on Gran Canaria in January 2000 (photographed); these also constitute the only records for the Western Palearctic. At the dam near Amarilla golf course, Tenerife, a Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* stayed on 6–12 May, while a dark-morph Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* was there from 20 June to 8 August at least. A Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* of unknown origin was at Roquito del Fraile, Tenerife, on 26 October. Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* were seen at Fuencaliente, La Palma, on 2 October, and at Salinas de Janubio, Lanzarote, on 19 October. On Tenerife, an immature male Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* was at Roquito del Fraile on 8–10 November at least. The first Hooded Merganser *Mergus cucullatus* for the Canary Islands, a female or first-winter, found on Tenerife on 11 December 2001, stayed till 11 March.

A female Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* was at Punta de Teno, Tenerife, on 5–8 May, with a female Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* also there on 5 May. A male Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* stayed at Los Rodeos, Tenerife, on 14–22 March, and a pale-morph

Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonora* was reported from Los Abrigos on 3 May. Up to six Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* were at Amarilla golf course on 7–15 May, with a Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* also there on 6–16 May. At Roquito del Fraile, Tenerife, a White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* was seen on 21 October, and Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* on 20–24 September (adult) and 26 October (juvenile), with another juvenile at Embalse de Valle Molina, on 22 October. The first Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* for the archipelago was found at Amarilla golf course, Tenerife, on 20 September and was still present on 22nd. On the same dates, a Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago gallinago delicata*, a distinctive Nearctic race of Common Snipe, was at Roquito del Fraile. A South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* was claimed from the La Gomera to Tenerife ferry on 17 July; if accepted, this would constitute the first for the Canary Islands.

Five Greater Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* were at Amarilla golf course, Tenerife, on 23 March, where there was also still a Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, present since 5 November 2001. At the same site, a late Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* was seen on 15–16 May. A Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* at Ten Bel, Tenerife, first seen on 26 January, was still present on 23 March (TC; per *Birding World* 15: 155, 200, 280, 324 & 392–393 and *Dutch Birding* 24: 173 & 234–241).

### Cape Verde Islands

In March 2001, the third Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* for the Cape Verdes was photographed; possibly this was one of a group of five that constituted the second record in October 2000 (per *Dutch Birding* 24: 173).

Records from the period February–March 2002 include the following. Two Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* were seen at Curral Velho, Boa Vista, on 3 March. At Mindelo, São Vicente, 3,000 Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* were counted on 28 February. A dark-morph Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*

was at Praia, Santiago, from 24 February to 4 March at least. The Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia* reported from Mindelo sewage ponds, São Vicente (*Bull. ABC* 9: 144), was still present 1–15 March, and the adult Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* from Rabil Lagoon, Boa Vista, on 4–20 March. Also at the latter site, an immature Great Blue Heron *A. herodias*, claimed on 5 March, would be the first for Cape Verde and West Africa; the species has previously been recorded on the Canary Islands and the Azores. Nine occupied nests of Cape Verde Purple Herons *A. [purpurea] bournei* were counted at Banana de Ribeira, Santiago, on 23 February; the site at Boa Entrada has apparently not been in use for some time. A Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* stayed at Rabil Lagoon, Boa Vista, on 4–17 March. A Black Kite *Milvus migrans* was on Raso on 25 February. Workers from the Peregrine Fund have apparently located, and narrowly failed to trap for captive breeding, the last four remaining Cape Verde Kites *Milvus [milvus] fasciicauda* on Boavista (*Peregrine Fund Newsletter* 32). A Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* stayed at Pedra de Lume, Sal, on 6–20 March. Four Common Waxbills *Estrilda astrild* were at Mindelo, São Vicente, from 28 February until 2 March at least (LB, TF; per *Birding World* 15: 155 & 278–280 and *Dutch Birding* 24: 173).

### Chad

Four Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* were seen on the Logone floodplain on 23 January 2001; there are few records of this species in the country. Isabelline Wheatears *Oenanthe isabellina* appeared to be very common at the same site (RM).

### Côte d'Ivoire

The bird list of Mount Sangbé National Park, in the west of the country, continues to grow. In the first half of June 2002, an adult Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* and a Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothura elegans* were recorded in the centre, while Grey-winged Robin Chat *Cossypha polioptera* and Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike *Malaconotus cruentus* were seen in the south-west. The most spectacular find, however, was an adult Black-headed Bee-eater *Merops breweri* with a juvenile; this constitutes the most westerly record of this species, which was only discovered in the country as recently as 1998, in Marahoué National Park. Emin's Shrike *Lanius gubernator* and Emerald Starling *Lamprolornis iris* were encountered again, suggesting their year-round presence in the park (HR).

During a visit to Banco National Park,

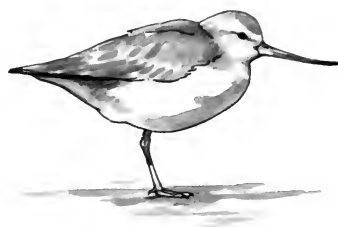


Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*  
by Mark Andrews

Abidjan, in September 2002, a White-crested Tiger Heron *Tigriornis leucolophus* was seen near a forest swamp. About 12 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* and 15 pairs of Intermediate Egrets *Egretta intermedia* were nesting, along with other species, on a small islet near the bridge over the Comoé River at Grand Bassam in May–July 2002; this heronry has existed since 1998 at least but the number of nesting birds is decreasing. In Banco National Park, a Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* was identified in January 2002. A Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* was observed at Assinie in August 2001, while a Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* was claimed from Grand Bassam in October 2001; the latter would constitute the second for the country, if accepted (BB). A Rufous Fishing Owl *Scotopelia ussheri* was found at Lamto, on 21 September 2002 and a female African Piculet *Sasia africana* in Yapo Forest, on 18 September (AR).

## Egypt

The following records are from the period March–July 2002. Two Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* flew past Ain Sukhna on 16 April and a Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* was off Nuweiba on 18th. Five nests of Red-billed Tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* were found on the southern Red Sea islands in the Wadi Gamal–Hamatta area on 29 June; at least one appeared to have been recently used. A Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* was seen at Abu Simbel on 5 April and 1 May. A pair of Green-backed Herons *Butorides striatus* bred on Crocodile Island in July and a Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* was on the Nile near Edfu on 19 June. Seven Yellow-billed Storks *Mycteria ibis* were seen at Abu Simbel on 5 April and 20 on 1 May. A female Scaup *Aythya marila* was at Aswan on 21 March. Eleven Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* were observed at Shalatein on 19 March. On 21 April an adult and an immature



Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*  
by Mark Andrews

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* were found at the Nabaq Protected Area; this is the first report of this species from south Sinai since the mid-1980s. Five Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* were at Gifton Saghir, Hurghada, on 25 April and over 100 pairs were counted on the southern Red Sea islands in the Wadi Gamal–Hamatta area on 29 June. A Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* was at Ain Sukhna on 17 March (per MBD & SBD).

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* were seen in the Nile Delta on 30 March (11), at Bilbeis on 22 April (15) and on Crocodile Island, Luxor, on 28 April (five), where they were also found breeding in July. Three Crab Plovers *Dromas ardeola* were on the southern Red Sea islands in the Wadi Gamal–Hamatta area on 29 June (per MBD & SBD), and two adults and four begging juveniles, apparently not yet able to fly, were in Hamatta mangrove, between Marsa Allam and Berenice, on 4 October (JYP). Single Black-winged Pratincoles *Glareola nordmanni* were at Safaga, Qena, on 27 April and at Abu Simbel on 30 April. Six adult and two chick Kittlitz's Plovers *Charadrius pecuarius* were at Bilbeis on 22 April. A Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* was at Hurghada on 18 March, with ten Sooty Gulls *Larus hemprichii* there on 27 March. An adult and an immature Grey-headed Gull *L. cirrocephalus* were reported from Hurghada, Red Sea, in April; the second record for the country if accepted. An estimated 3,000–5,000 pairs of Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* were breeding on an island at Lake Qaroun, El Fayoum, on 9 June; this is the second known colony in Egypt. Tern records include a Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* at Abu Simbel on 11 April, 58 Greater Crested Terns *S. bergii* at Ain Sukhna on 16 April, 50 White-cheeked Terns *S. repressa* at Hurghada on 25 April, and 700 pairs of Bridled Terns *S. anaethetus* on the southern Red Sea islands in the Wadi Gamal–Hamatta area on 29 June. African Collared Doves *Streptopelia roseogrisea* were seen at Abu Simbel on 25

March (two) and 30 April (one), and at Sheikh Shadli on 2 July (at least six). Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* bred on Crocodile Island in July. A Hume's Tawny Owl *Strix butleri* was at Wadi Feyran on 18 April.

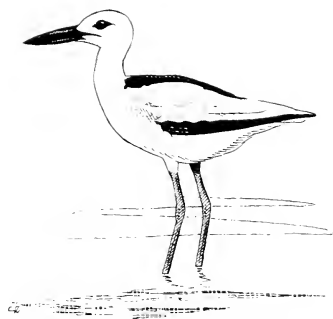
At El Gouna, 52 Bimaculated Larks *Melanocorypha bimaculata* were counted on 18 March. Two Temminck's Horned Larks *Eremophila bilopha* were at Wadi El Ughaydirah, Sinai, on 17 April. Up to eight African Pied Wagtails *Motacilla aguimp* stayed at Abu Simbel in March–May. A pair of Hooded Crows *Corvus corone cornix* at Gifton Village, Hurghada, on 25 December 2001, and two in the centre of Hurghada on 3 January 2002, represent a southward range extension. Red Avadavat *Amandara amandara* bred on Crocodile Island in July. A Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* was at El Gouna, Hurghada, on 24 April (per MBD & SBD).

## Eritrea

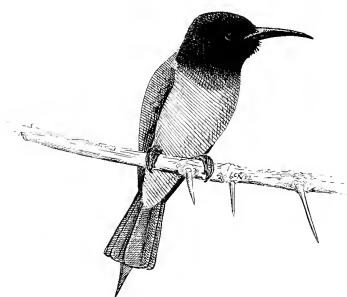
A White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* was photographed at the Seawater Farms, Massawa; it stayed for at least one month at a freshwater body (JT; Fig 3). This is apparently the third record for the country, the previous being of a bird near Tessanie during winter 1994–95 (Bull. ABC 3: 130) and of up to four at Sembel Dam in October–November 1997 (Bull. ABC 5: 72).

## Ethiopia

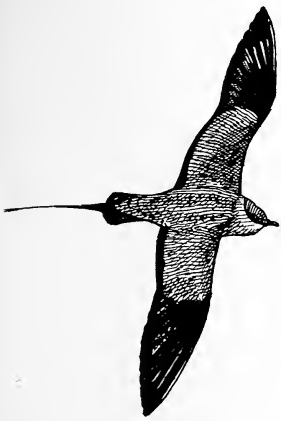
A Lineated Pytilia *Pytilia phoenicoptera lineata*, a rather rarely seen race of Red-winged Pytilia (sometimes treated as a separate species) with a distinctive red bill, was observed at the bottom of the Ankober road on 6 May 2002 (JG); this sighting is within the range of the taxon, which is between 07°30'N and 14°30'N, mainly west of the Rift Valley and extending to the western lowlands (Ash & Miskell in prep. *The Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea*).



Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*  
by Craig Robson



Black-headed Bee-eater *Merops breweri*  
by Craig Robson



Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*  
by Craig Robson

## Ghana

Records from the period February–May 2002 include the following. Four adult and a juvenile **White-backed Night Heron** *Gorsachius leuconotus* were at Bui National Park, on 19 May. Records that constitute additions to published Important Bird Area (IBA) lists include a pair of **Nkulengu Rail** *Himantornis haematopus* at Ankasa Resource Reserve, on 11 May, a **Yellow-throated Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx flavigularis*



White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*  
by Craig Robson

at Kakum National Park, on 14 May, a **Red-chested Owlet** *Glaucidium tephronotum* at Atewa Range Forest Reserve, on 26 May, and a **Brown Nightjar** *Caprimulgus binotatus* at Kakum National Park, on 13 May (AR). The claim of an **African Dwarf Kingfisher** *Ceyx lecontei* at Mole National Park, on 26 February (Bull. ABC 9: 145) has been withdrawn; the habitat there is indeed unfavourable for this forest species and the identification must therefore be considered doubtful (RC). At Atewa Range, **Yellow-casqued Hornbill** *Ceratogymna elata* (seen on 17 May), **Cassin's Honeybird** *Prodotiscus insignis* (26

May) and **Yellow-footed Honeyguide** *Melignomon eisentrauti* (17 May) are further additions to the IBA list (AR).

A single male **Ibadan/Cassin's Malimbe** *Malimbus ibadanensis/cassini* was seen in Kakum National Park on 20 February and two more the next day; the identity of these intriguing malimbos, which have already been reported from Ghana in the past, is still not certain; the endangered Ibadan Malimbe has hitherto only been positively identified from a small area around Ibadan, south-west Nigeria, whereas Cassin's occurs in the Lower Guinea forest block (RC).

## Guinea

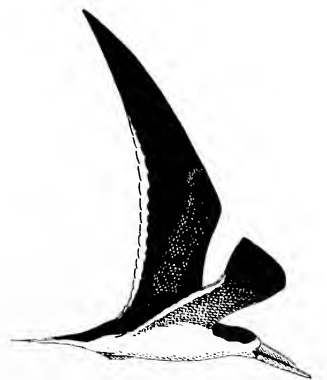
During field work in south-west Mali, at the confluence of the Bafing and Balé Rivers, on the border with north-east Guinea, in mid-February 2002, several species seen on the Guinea side were new for this country (see Bull. ABC 9: 145). **Black-faced Firefinch** *Lagonosticta larvata*, also seen then, appears to be yet another species that was added to the country's list (RJD & FDL).

## Kenya

Records from the period May–October 2002 include the following. A seasonal pool in the Rift behind the Ngong Hills attracted about seven **Dwarf Bittern** *Ixobrychus sturmii* and a Madagascar Squacco (=Malagasy Pond) Heron *Ardeola idae* in June; this area is also good for Bush Pipit *Anthus caffer* and Southern Grosbeak Canary *Serinus buechanani*, both hard to find elsewhere. A **Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus* in the Nairobi suburbs, on 2 October, was in an unusual location. An **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*, observed at Naivasha on 3 June, was one of the few non-breeders that remain each year. A pair of **Palm-nut Vultures** *Gypohierax angolensis* along the Nzoia River on 14 September was an unusually western record for Kenya. A single pale-morph **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* was over Longonot, on 10 October (per CJ). A **Dickinson's Kestrel** *Falco dickinsoni* was observed at Thika on 23 July; this species is a rare visitor to Kenya, recorded only in June–August (NR). A pair of **Peregrine Falcons** *F. peregrinus* bred on the Agip Building, Westlands, Nairobi, in August.

Two **Black-rumped Buttonquails** *Turnix hottentotta* were calling at Nambale, Sio River, western Kenya, on 15 September. A **Baillon's Crane** *Porzana pusilla* would appear to be resident at Sukari Dam, Peponi School, Nairobi, having been regularly seen there over the past year. A male **Denham's Bustard** *Neotis denhami* was observed in the Masai Mara,

on 29 June; this species has suffered a dramatic decline over the past 20 years and is now uncommon. Also in the Masai Mara, a **Brown-chested Lapwing** *Vanellus superciliosus* was seen on 6 October. A single **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* in summer plumage was on Lake Nakuru in early July. Four **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* were at the Gongoni saltpans, Malindi, on 7 October (Fig 4); this is an unusually large inland group. An **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* photographed at Sabaki River mouth on 6 July, would be the first for Kenya if accepted. Also there, on 8 October, a flock of eight **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris*, is the highest number recorded for many years. A **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus* in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, on 24 July, may represent only the second record for this site. The first **European Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* for the season were reported on 9 September, over Kakamega Forest. Single **African Pittas** *Pitta angolensis* were recorded at Thika, on 6–7 June, and in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, on 16 June, with a probable record at the latter locality in late July likely to be the same bird. On 29 May, three **Friedmann's Larks** *Mirafrapa pulpa* were singing in Shaba National Reserve, the area where some of the early records of this little-known species were made, but where it has recorded only very infrequently since. Most records are from the Tsavo area, where birds were heard singing on Taita ranch on 18 October. A pair of **Pangani Longclaws** *Macronyx aurantiigula* at Shaba National Reserve on 29 May, represent a small range extension to the north-west. A **Spotted Ground Thrush** *Zosterops guttata* near Gede, away from the usual site, on 17 August is the first record for several years. A **Green Hyilia** *Hyilia prasina* was found in a small remnant forest patch at Mumias Sugar, on 14 September, and a pair of **Gambaga Flycatchers** *Muscicapa gambagae* c30 km



African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*  
by Craig Robson



African Pitta *Pitta angolensis*  
by Mark Andrews

north of Archer's Post on the slopes of Mt Lolokwe. A Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer* in Kakamega Forest, on 13 September, represents the first record in ten years from this site. A Pringle's Puffback *Dryoscopus pringlii* was photographed on the Magadi road, Rift Valley, in May; this appears to be a representative of a population disjunct from its currently mapped, more eastern, distribution. Also there was a Fire-fronted Bishop *Euplectes diadematus*; there are only a few records of this species for the area, normally after heavy rains. A female was ringed at Mwamba Field Study Centre, Watamu, on 15 August (per *Cf*).

## Madeira

The following records from the period March–September 2002 were reported. Over 1,300 Bulwer's Petrels *Bulweria bulwerii* flew past Ponta do Sol on 26 August, 44 Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis* past Porto Moniz on 30 August, and an exceptional 1,393 Great Shearwaters *P. gravis* also past Porto Moniz the next day (per *Birding World* 15: 374). Zino's Petrels *Pterodroma madeira* were found at their mountain breeding site throughout July, with a possible seen from the Porto Santo ferry on 28th. A Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* and six Fea's Petrels *Pterodroma feae* were also seen from that ferry the same day (per *Birding World* 15: 280). A Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* was watched off Funchal on 7 April (per *Birding World* 15: 155). A first-summer Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* was at Canico Bay on 12 May and an adult on Porto Santo on 24 July (per *Birding World* 15: 280). Three Squacco Herons *Ardeola ralloides* were at Machico, on the east coast, on 1 May, with two remaining until 14 May; there are fewer than five previous records in the last 50 years (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200).

Two Eleonora's Falcons *Falco eleonorae* were seen south of Bica da Cana on 18 August (per *Birding World* 15: 374). A pair of Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* with six fledglings on Porto Santo in August–September may constitute the first breeding record for Madeira (per *Dutch Birding* 24: 309). Two Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* were at Canical on 3 May and 15 Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* at Machico on 1 May (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200). An adult Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* was photographed on Porto Santo on 3 September (per *Dutch Birding* 24: 309). An adult Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* in breeding plumage was at Machico from 27 August to at least 7 September (per *Birding World* 15: 374).

An adult Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoideus* was seen at Machico on 21 March (*NS*), whereas a first-summer bird was still in Funchal harbour on 7 April. Also at the latter locality was a second-summer Ring-billed Gull *L. delawarensis* on 6–7 April and an adult on 2 September (per *Birding World* 15: 155 & 374). A Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* was in Funchal harbour on 13 April; this appears to be only the second record for Madeira (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200). Up to 16 Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* were observed off the south coast from 6 April. Eight pairs attempted to nest near the Lido west of Funchal, but failed due to disturbance; three individuals were still in Funchal Harbour on 4 July (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200 & 280).

An Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* was at Santa Cruz on 8 April (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200). Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* were observed near São Vicente on 5 April (two), at Santa Cruz on 8 April, and at Machico on 2–3 May (the latter the sixth record, and the fifth this year). Two Eurasian Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* were at Boca do Risco on 1 May (per *Birding World* 15: 199–200).

## Mali

During a field trip in the Réserve partielle du Sahel in Burkina Faso's extreme north, in June 2002 (see above), several Mottled Swifts *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* were observed c15 km across the border, in Mali, on 9th. There is only one previous record, from the Bandiagara escarpment, c250 km to the west (*BP*).

## Morocco

Records from the period March–April 2002 include the following. The adult Common Gull *Larus canus* at Oued Sous, Agadir, present in February–April was

presumably the same individual as in previous years. Also there was a Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* on 14 April. A pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos *Clamator glandarius* was at Biougra on 16 April. Isabelline Wheatears *Oenanthe isabellina* were recorded at Bou-Bernous on 28 March, at Tazenakht on 2 and 13 April, and at Erfoud on 11 April (two) (per *Birding World* 15: 155 & 200 and *Dutch Birding* 24: 177).

## Namibia

Single Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* were observed at Swakopmund, on 26 May 2002, and at Walvis Bay pump station, in August and September. A Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* was at Walvis Bay lagoon in September. Single Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* were noted at Swakopmund on 1–21 May and at Walvis Bay on 23 May and in September. Three Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* were at Walvis Bay salt works in August. A Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* was reported from Walvis Bay on 13 May and in September (*ZfB*).

## Nigeria

Records for the period April–October 2002 include the following. Despite heavy logging in the Kagoro area, most of the forest species still cling on and during April the following species were recorded, for which Kagoro represents the most northern, isolated site in the country: Cassin's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus africanus*, White-bellied Kingfisher *Alcedo leucogaster*, Little Grey Greenbul *Andropadus gracilis*, Honeyguide Greenbul *Baeopogon indicator*, White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis*, Forest Robin *Stiphornis erythrothorax*, Buff-throated Apalis *Apalis rufogularis*, Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapa caerulea*, Shrike Flycatcher *Megabyas flammulatus*, Brown Illadopsis *Illadopsis fulvescens*, Puvell's Illadopsis *I. puvelli* and Capuchin Babbler *Phyllastrephus atripennis* (*PH*).

In the Jos area, a European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* was at Amurum, on 28 September, with a different individual present the next day (*JW*). In the Shere Hills, near Amurum, a Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circus beaudouini* was observed on 23 May; this may be the first confirmed record for Plateau State. A Brown Snake Eagle *C. cinereus* found on its nest near Jos, on 1 October, apparently represents the first breeding record for Nigeria (*MH*). A Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* was at Rockwater, Jos, on 27 October (*JW*). On 23 May, a new site for Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*,

the first for the high plateau, was found in the Shere Hills (MH).

Records from Alagarno, in the extreme north-east, from October, include the second country record of a dark-phase Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (a female) on 7th. Two **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* and a **Barbary Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* *pelegrinoides*, also a second for the country, were recorded on 5th, whereas Nigeria's northernmost **Pennant-winged Nightjar** *Macrodipteryx longipennis* was found the next day. A **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* was seen there on 9th (JW).

In the south, the continued presence of **Baumann's Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus baumannii* at IITA, Ibadan, was confirmed by a sighting in October. Also in October, **Anambra Waxbill** *Estrilda poliopareia* was found again in the Tombia area, Niger Delta, Bayelsa State (LF); the first sightings of this Nigerian endemic in 16 years were made here in March 2001 (cf. *Bull. ABC* 9: 147–148).



Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis* by Mark Andrews

### São Tomé & Príncipe

The following three species, observed in September–October 2002, appear to be new to the islands. Two **Bat Hawks** *Macheiramphus alcinus* were seen flying over São Tomé town in late afternoon of 30 September. Six **Sanderling** *Calidris alba* were video-taped on São Tomé beach, near the Hotel Miramar, on 1 October and one at Santo António, Príncipe, on 5 October. A **Lesser Striped Swallow** *Hirundo abyssinica* was observed at Roca Belo Monte, Príncipe, on 6 October. Also there were two **Willow Warblers** *Phylloscopus trochilus* on 5 October, with one the next day; the only published record for the islands is of a few individuals resting on a ferry between São Tomé and Príncipe in March 1992 (HU).

### Seychelles

A report of a **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* on Bird Island, around 9 November 2001, constitutes the second in Seychelles and the first for any shrike species outside spring, when the pattern of migration suggests a more likely occurrence.

Noteworthy records from the period April–October 2002 include the following. **Sightings of Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* on Bird Island, on 20–24 June, and at the Yacht Basin, Victoria, Mahé, on 1 July, represent the third and fourth for Seychelles. A **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* at the airstrip on Bird Island, on 10–13 October, was documented by several birders and will be the first for the islands, if confirmed by Seychelles Bird Records Committee. Two previous reports pre-date the formation of the committee and were accepted as *Ardeola* sp due to a lack of supporting evidence to eliminate confusion species. A **Malagasy Pond Heron** *A. grayii* on North Island, on 9 August, was the second for Seychelles outside the c1,100 km distant Aldabra group (where it breeds on Aldabra Atoll, and it has also been recorded on Cosmoledo Atoll). Two **Intermediate Egrets** *Egretta intermedia* which stayed on Platte Island from 25 April to 10 September, represent the second report for Seychelles. A vagrant **Great Egret** *E. alba* was found on D'Arros on 18 May. Two **Oriental Pratincoles** *Glareola maldivarum* at Lemuria golf course, Praslin, on 17 October, increasing to three on 19 October, are the seventh report for Seychelles. A **Grey-headed Wagtail** *Motacilla flava thumbergi* was on Platte on 25 April–1 May (AS).

### South Africa

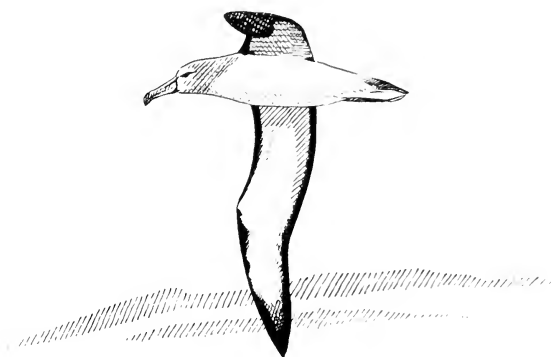
Records from pelagic trips out of Cape Town in the period May–October 2002 include **Wandering Albatross** *Diomedea exulans* (all months, 1–2 per trip), **Northern Royal Albatross** *D. [epomophora] sanfordi* (all months except July, 1–2 per trip), **Grey-headed Albatross** *Thalassarche chrysostoma* (May–June, singles), **Salvin's Albatross** *T. salvinii* (formerly treated as a race of Shy Albatross *T. cauta*; all months except June, 1–4 per trip), **Slender-billed Prion** *Pachyptila belcheri* (a much sought-after species; May–August, with a maximum of six recorded on a trip), **Spectacled Petrel** *Procellaria [aequinotialis] conspicillata* (May–July, singles), **Grey Petrel** *Procellaria cinerea* (May and July, singles), **White-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta grallaria* (May–June, singles), **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* of the race *runneyi* (11 May, one) and **Greater Shearwater** *Chionis alba* (June and

August, singles) (ZfB).

The following reports are from the period May–October 2002. The long-staying **Australasian Gannet** *Sula serrator* was still present at Malgas Island, Western Cape, on 21 May. Southern Africa's first **Western Reef Egret** *Egretta gularis* found in Cape of Good Hope Reserve, Western Cape, on 13 April, was present until 30 May. The first **Snowy Egret** *E. thula* for southern Africa, discovered at Zandvlei, Western Cape, on 23 April, remained until 4 May. The two long-staying **Slaty Egrets** *E. vinacea* from Marievale Bird Sanctuary, Gauteng, discovered there in early December 2001, were also still present in May, with subsequent reports from September. A **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* was seen at Wakkerstroom, Mpumalanga, in October.

A **Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola* was recorded at Umlalazi Nature Reserve, Mtunzini, KwaZulu-Natal, in October. A long-staying **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* remained at the mouth of Gamtoos River, Eastern Cape, from 10 February to at least July, with subsequent reports from October. A **Lesser Sand** (=Mongolian) **Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* was at the Kromme River mouth, Eastern Cape, in July. The two **American Golden Plovers** *Pluvialis dominica* found at De Mond Nature Reserve, Western Cape, on 26 March, were still present on 4 May. A **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* stayed at West Coast National Park, Western Cape, in October; it was probably the same individual that was found at this site earlier this year, when it represented the first for southern Africa. A **Baird's Sandpiper** *C. bairdii* was identified at Kenhardt Sewage Works, Northern Cape, in September. At Richard's Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* was seen in September–October. In September, a **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* was reported from Marievale Bird Sanctuary, Gauteng, and a **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* from Ndumu Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal. A **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* was at Cape Recife, near Port Elisabeth, Eastern Cape, on 22–24 May and in October (ZfB) and at least seven were found in late June and early July (per *Dutch Birding* 24: 241). A **Black-headed Gull** *L. ridibundus* stayed at Port Elisabeth in August–October and a **Heuglin's Gull** *L. [argentatus] heuglini* at Riet Point, near Port Alfred, Eastern Cape, in July. A **Black-naped Tern** *Sterna sumatrana* and a **Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris* were reported from Richard's Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, in October. A **Bridled Tern** *Sterna anaethetus*, possibly the bird that was also present in 2001, was seen at Cape Recife,





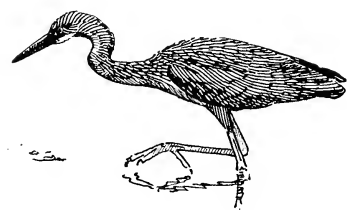
Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* by Craig Robson

Eastern Cape, from the end of May into July. An African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris* was at Ndumu Game Reserve in September.

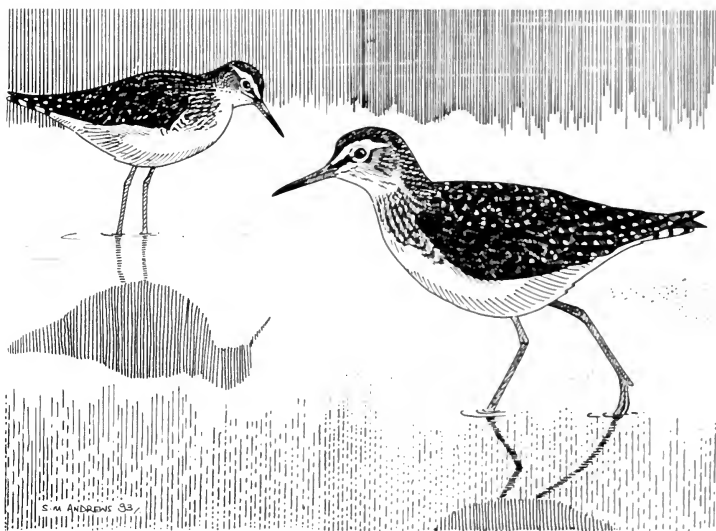
Southern Africa's third European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* was found in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Northern Cape, on 7 May. Three Eastern Saw-wings *Psalipteron orientalis* were identified at Ndumu Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, in September. A Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus* was observed at Nwanetsi, Kruger National Park, in October. (ZfB). During a bird-ringing course at Lamberts Bay, Western Cape, at the end of October, an out-of-range Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus* was mist-netted (DO).

### Tanzania

As part of an ongoing study, some 1,000 birds were ringed and measured in the Udzungwa Mountains forests in 2001, among which were 22 Swynnerton's Robins *Swynnertonia swynnertonii*, five Dappled Mountain Robins *Arcanator orostruthus*, seven Moreau's Sunbirds *Cinnyris moreaui* and four Rufous-winged Sunbirds *Cinnyris rufipennis*; the most abundantly mist-netted species was, not surprisingly, Eastern Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra olivacea* (234 trapped) (TSR).



Slaty Egret *E. vinaceigula*  
by Mark Andrews



Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* by Mark Andrews

### Togo

A Little Rush (=African Sedge) Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* was displaying in a wetland at the Zio River, north of Lome, on 8 June 2002; this appears to be the first for the country and also the first confirmed record west of Nigeria (GS). See p.51 of this issue for details.

### Tunisia

Records from the period February–September 2002 include the following. Counts of waterbirds at Oued Rmal Reservoir, on 8 September, included about 200 Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*, 32 Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, 412 Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, 357 Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and 131 White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*. On 2 February more than 1,493 Marbled

Duck were counted in three wetlands in the south: 1,300+ at Blidette (33°34'N 08°51'E), 176 at Machiouha (33°33'N 08°58'E; this wetland was visited for the first time and has not been mentioned previously in the ornithological literature) and 17 at Zlalla (33°29'N 08°54'E). This confirms that concentrations of wintering Marbled Duck in southern Tunisian wetlands have become regular. On 26 May 2002, in the Kairouan area, behaviour of 20 Marbled Duck and 25 White-headed Duck (13 males and 12 females) indicated that they were preparing to breed locally. A Barbary Falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinoides* was observed near Regim Matoug during an expedition to the south on 25–28 July (HA).

### Uganda

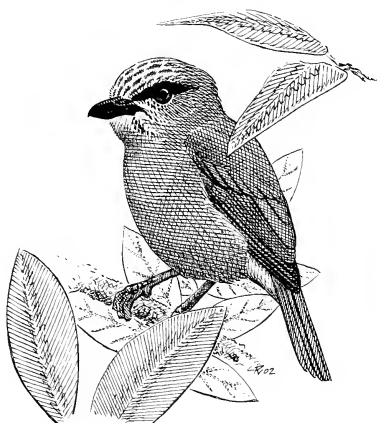
Records from the period May–July 2002 include the following. An African Green Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri* was observed at its nest along the trail to the swamp at Ruhija, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, on 13 May (PC per MW). On 14 May, at 13.00 hrs, an African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* flew into a window of the Uganda Wildlife Authorities park office at Kabale, situated in the middle of a busy street, stunning itself. The bird, which died the next day, appeared to have a serious wound, received prior to flying into the window and presumably inflicted by a predator. An estimated 200 Blue Swallows *Hirundo atrocaerulea* were counted on 13–14 July in the Sango Bay area, an Important Bird Area at the shores of Lake Victoria north of the Uganda/Tanzania border; nearly all were in primary and tail moult (MW).



Following the confirmation of the presence of **Ansorge's Greenbul** *Andropadus ansorgei* in Bwindi (see *Bull. ABC* 9: 140–141), the species was observed again in July 2002 and, as suspected, appears to be common in the lower sections of the forest. A **Yellow-footed Flycatcher** *Muscicapa sethsmithi*, which had apparently been present for several months when observed in July, appears to be a new record for the park; this species was previously only known from Budongo. A **Magpie Mannikin** *Lonchura fringilloides* was seen en route to Hoima on 16 July; this is an uncommon and local species in Uganda (NB).

## Zambia

Reports from August–September 2002 include an **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*, seen on one of the islands near Chiawa, Lower Zambezi, on 1 September. An **African Hobby** *Falco cuvieri* was observed hunting above the Kafue Flats on 9 September. An **African Snipe** *Gallinago nigripennis* was seen near Chiawa, Lower Zambezi, on 31 August and a **Pel's Fishing Owl** *Scotopelia*



African Green Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri* by Mark Andrews

*pelii* was photographed on Siankaba Island, Upper Zambezi, on 6 September (GO). 📷

Records were collated by Ron Demey from contributions supplied by Maarten van den Akker (MvdA), Hichem Azafzaf (HA), Zest

for Birds (ZfB), Bruno Boedts (BB), Leo Boon (LB), Nik Borrow/Birdquest (NB), Patrick Cardwell (PC), Tony Clarke (TC), Callan Cohen (CC), Richard Cruse (RC), Mindy Baha El Din (MBD), Sherif Baha El Din (SBD), Robert J. Dowsett (RJD), Lincoln Fishpool (LF), Tommy Frandsen (TF), John Gerhart (JG), Phil Hall (PH), Mark Hopkins (MH), Colin Jackson (CJ), Marc Languy (ML), Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire (FDL), Ronald Messemaker (RM), Michael Mills (MM), Dieter Oschadleus (DO), Gerard Ouwenel (GO), Jean-Yves Piel (JYP), Bruno Portier (BP), Hugo Rainey (HR), Nigel Redman/Birdquest (NR), Adam Riley (AR), Tom S. Romdal (TSR), Valéry Schollaert (VS), Gavin Selfe (GS), Adrian Skerrett (AS), Neville Skinner (NS), Jugal Tiwari (JT), Hannes Uhlig (HU), Jared Wilson (JW), Malcolm Wilson (MW), Tony Wood (TW) and from Africa—Birds & Birding, Birding World and Dutch Birding.

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# A survey of the highland grassland endemics in Mau Narok/Molo Important Bird Area, Kenya

Kariuki Ndag'ang'a, Ronald Mulwa and Patrick Gichuki

L'étendue, la répartition et la qualité de ce qui reste de l'habitat herbeux dans les Mau Narok-Molo grasslands, Zone d'Importance pour la Conservation des Oiseaux (ZICO) au Kenya, ont été évaluées du 16 au 24 septembre 2001. Les auteurs ont également estimé la répartition et la densité de deux espèces globalement menacées et à répartition restreinte, la Sentinelle de Sharpe *Macronyx sharpei* et la Cisticole des Aberdare *Cisticola aberdare*. La plus grande partie (48%) de la ZICO était constituée de cultures, tandis que les zones herbeuses ne comprenaient que 33%, les plus importantes se trouvant dans la partie la plus méridionale, occupée principalement par la communauté pastorale Masai. La Sentinelle de Sharpe avait une densité de 1,2 individus par ha et était la deuxième espèce la plus communément observée. La Cisticole des Aberdare a été observée dans trois parcelles seulement, avec un total de sept individus. La conversion à grande échelle en cultures d'orge et de froment constitue une menace grave pour les zones herbeuses. La ZICO en possède toutefois encore des étendues considérables de haute qualité et elle est ainsi importante pour la conservation des espèces endémiques de cet habitat. Les initiatives de conservation devraient donc se concentrer sur ces zones.

The Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) holds significant areas of Kenya's unique highland grasslands. This and Kinangop Grasslands IBA (Fig 1), either side of the central Rift Valley, are the only sites that hold significant areas of this habitat, which lacks any formal protection in Kenya and is rapidly vanishing. They are home to several migratory bird species and various specialised grassland birds, and are of key importance as they harbour the restricted-range Sharpe's Longclaw

*Macronyx sharpei* and Aberdare Cisticola *Cisticola aberdare*, both classified as Endangered by BirdLife International<sup>2</sup>. No adequate information concerning the status of either species or their grassland habitat is available from Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands. Between 16 and 24 September 2001, we surveyed the extent, distribution and condition of the remaining grassland habitat, and estimated the distribution and density of these species. We also used the survey to (1) increase awareness among the local community of the conservation value of the IBA, (2) make opportunistic contacts with interested members of this community with the aim of initiating a local conservation group or Site Support Group (SSG), and (3) involve and train three members of the Kinangop Grasslands SSG in grassland survey methods. Here, we present the basic results of our work.

## Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands

The Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands IBA is an extensive montane grassland situated on the crest of the Mau escarpment, which forms the western wall of the central Rift Valley in Kenya. This high, open plateau occupies c80 km south-east to north-west, and is bounded (and partially interrupted) by the Mau Forest complex. Rainfall is c1,000 mm per year, and the original vegetation is short grassland, with some heather and scrub on ridges where soils are deeper. The area has high potential for agriculture, and has gradually been settled since the 1950s; it is now heavily populated, with a landscape severely modified by cultivation. Cereals are the main crops.

The IBA is sited in Nakuru and (a small part of) Narok districts, within Rift Valley province. Population density in Nakuru district is high (164 per km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>8</sup>. The main occupants of the study area are smallholders of the Kikuyu

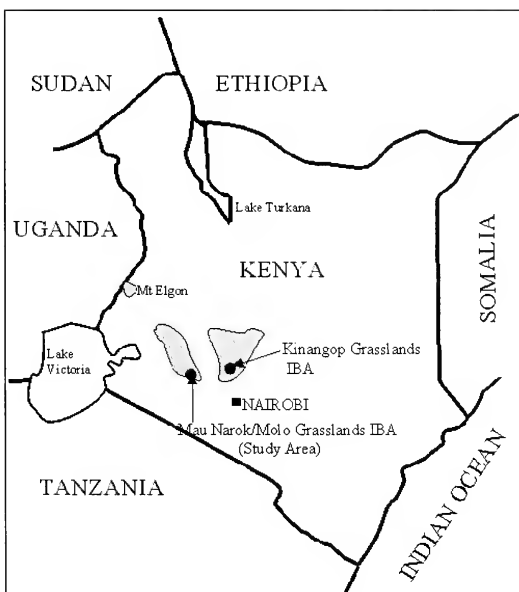


Figure 1. Total range of Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei* (shaded area) showing the locations of the study area (Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands IBA) and Kinangop Grasslands (the probable stronghold of the species).

and Kalenjin communities (Molo and northern Mau Narok) and the Masai community (who are traditionally livestock herders) in the southern Mau Narok.

Methods

We continuously mapped broad land-use categories over a predetermined route through the grasslands by estimating the percentage cover of each habitat around points en route, at intervals of 1.5 km. Transects were conducted every 3 km to survey grassland birds in selected 1-ha plots within larger grasslands. Thirty-seven plots were surveyed. The area of each larger patch was recorded as <5, 5–20 or >20 ha, and the plots were surveyed by a team of six people spread across the width of the area, walking slowly across it 10–20 m apart. All species and individuals flushed were recorded. Measures of grassland quality were also noted within the plot using a system developed for monitoring grassland habitat in Kinangop. Grass height was recorded as G1 (short), G2 (medium length) and G3 (tall). Percentage tussock cover was recorded as T1 (no or just a few scattered tussocks), T2 (moderate tussock covering up to 30% of area), T3 (considerable tussock covering 30–60% of area), and T4 (dense tussock covering >60% of area). The number of livestock and other bird species within the entire patch were also recorded.

Results

Sixty species were recorded in the grassland patches surveyed. Sharpe’s Longclaw occurred at a relatively high overall density, of 1.2 individuals per ha, throughout the 37 plots, i.e. slightly higher than the 0.85 per ha from sample plots in Kinangop recorded by Muchai *et al.*<sup>5</sup>. However, the Mau Narok/Molo density compares well with that noted only in those plots with short grass and tussocks at Kinangop<sup>5</sup>. The species occurred at 2.2 per ha in plots within grasslands of >20 ha, compared to those of <20 ha where the species occurred at densities of 0.2 per ha. Based on overall density, it was the fourth most abundant species after Black-winged Lapwing *Vanellus melanopterus*, Red-capped Lark *Calandrella cinerea* and Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*. Jackson’s Widowbird *Euplectes jacksoni*, a Near-Threat-

ened species, was the fifth most abundant species. The longclaw was encountered in 17 out of 37 survey plots, and was the second most frequently encountered species after Grassland Pipit, which was recorded in 22 plots.

Aberdare Cisticola was recorded in only three plots, with a total of seven individuals, suggesting a low density. However, it is probable that the species was under-recorded during the counts as the transect method used was designed for surveying Sharpe’s Longclaw and may not be as appropriate for the cisticola, which may also utilise different habitat. The few individuals to be located were all on or close to slightly bushy grassland. Other commonly encountered species (and the number of plots in which they were recorded) were Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris* (17), Red-capped Lark (14), Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* (ten), Baglaffeht Weaver *Ploceus baglaffeht* (nine) and Wing-snapping Cisticola *Cisticola ayresii* (eight).

As grasslands were estimated to cover one-third (c13,000 ha) of the IBA, the area surveyed was c0.3% of the IBA’s grassland area. The plots were, however, within patches totalling approximately 2,150 ha (16.5%).

Grassland cover

Grasslands covered only one-third of the estimated area (c40,000 ha)<sup>1</sup> of the entire IBA (Table 1), while cultivation covered approximately 50%. The spatial distribution of grasslands varied between the Molo and Mau Narok areas of the IBA. Most (75%) of the 20 grassland patches surveyed in Narok district (southern Mau Narok) were >20 ha. Only 35% of the 17 patches in Nakuru district (Molo block and northern Mau Narok) were >20 ha in size. Grasslands in Molo occurred as patches of varying sizes and were mostly isolated by cultivation. The main crops in Molo were maize and pyrethrum. Wheat, barley and potatoes were also common.

Grassland extent and distribution in Mau Narok varied between that occupied by smallholders and that by the mainly pastoral Masai community. The north-west Mau Narok was heavily cultivated and only 14.4% held grasslands. Smallholders of the Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities, who mainly cultivate maize, potatoes and

**Table 1.** Percentage land-use within Molo (n=30) and Mau Narok (n=55) areas of the Mau Narok-Molo Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA), Kenya. Estimates for the entire IBA (N=85) are also presented.

Land use	Molo		Mau Narok		Entire IBA	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Grassland	33.3	23.6	33.2	19.7	33.3	21.0
Cultivation	45.1	22.6	49.2	18.9	47.8	20.3
Exotic tree plantations	14.0	8.4	6.2	5.6	9.0	7.6
Settlements	5.7	3.5	3.0	2.1	3.9	3.0
Indigenous forest	2.2	6.7	6.2	11.6	4.8	10.3
Dams/water reservoirs	0.1	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Woodland/thicket	0.0	0.0	2.0	9.0	1.3	7.3

vegetables, occupied most of this area. Elsewhere in Mau Narok, where the Masai are the principal land-users, grasslands covered 43.2%. In particular, more extensive grasslands were found in two regions of Mau Narok: west of Mau Narok town around Olokurto, and south of Mau Narok between Olorropil and south through Ol Chorro and Ol Joro.

Principal crops in cultivated areas of Masai land were barley and wheat, which mainly occurred on extensive farms accessible to agricultural machinery (Fig 2). The Masai community traditionally practised pastoralism and tended to abandon extensive pasture to their livestock (Fig 3). This practice is, however, becoming rarer due to the advent of large-scale crop cultivation. Barley and wheat, which are potentially more lucrative than livestock farming, are currently being increasingly cultivated and pose a major threat, especially to large grasslands in southern Mau Narok. The remaining grasslands are now heavily grazed as the pastoralists still herd large numbers of cattle.

In comparison to Kinangop Grasslands IBA, the rem-

nant grasslands at Mau Narok/Molo IBA were larger, although isolated by large areas under cereals, probably because most land holdings are larger in Mau Narok and Molo than in Kinangop<sup>6</sup>.

Throughout the study area continuous grasslands appear to survive mostly along shallow sloping valleys. Seventeen (46%) of the surveyed grasslands were along watercourses and none was <5 ha. Most grasslands were heavily grazed and had short grass, as the Masai keep large herds of cattle on these areas. We counted 2,351 cows, 7,307 sheep and goats, and 42 donkeys within an area of c2,000 ha, at a grazing intensity of nine large animal units (LAU) per ha. We assume that a single LAU is equivalent to one cow or five sheep, and represents the metabolic equivalent of a 454-kg cow<sup>7</sup>.

A higher proportion (15) of the plots had moderate tussock cover. Only two plots had dense tussock, whereas nine plots completely lacked or had just a few scattered tussocks. Sharpe's Longclaw strongly prefers short grass with tussocks<sup>3,4</sup>. Most of the survey plots (62%) had short grass with tussocks.

Most (20) of the surveyed grasslands were >20 ha, whereas 13 were 5–20 ha. Only four patches were <5 ha in size. The 82 points where land-use was surveyed covered a total area of 14,496 ha (c36% of the IBA).

### Training SSG members, awareness and contacts

The three SSG members from Kinangop gained skills in grassland bird survey techniques. Posters have been developed by the Friends of Kinangop Plateau to raise awareness concerning the importance of conserving Kinangop Grassland IBA, which faces similar threats to Mau Narok/Molo. Thirteen of the latter posters, 22 national posters with information concerning all Kenyan IBAs and 25 Kenyan IBA fact sheets were distributed. Talks outlin-



Figure 2. Large barley and wheat plantations are replacing grasslands, with small grassland strips being left along watercourses (Kariuki Ndag'ang'a)



Figure 3. Remnant areas of the preferred habitat of Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei* (short grass with tussocks) in the Masai-occupied area of Olokurto area, Mau Narok (Kariuki Ndag'ang'a)



Figure 4. A survey member presents an awareness talk to pupils at a local primary school in Molo (Kariuki Ndag'ang'a)

ing the conservation importance of the IBA were made to children and teachers at two schools (By-Gum and Segututou primary schools), and informative material presented to a student and headmaster at two additional schools (Fig 4). Seven contacts keen to form a Site Support Group were made.

## Recommendations

- Initiate Site Support Group(s) for the IBA, based on existing and other, strategically sought contacts.
- Identify landowners and/or community leaders who control the management of large areas of land, and use them as focal points to influence management of such areas to the benefit of conservation.
- Determine those grassland management practices (eg stocking levels) that are compatible with conservation of key bird species, and the economic costs of their adoption, through well-focused research.

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The Club aims to appoint many further ABC Representatives. If you are interested in supporting and promoting the Club in your region, have any queries, or require further information relating to the ABC Representatives scheme please do not hesitate to contact Paul Lascelles, the Country Representatives Coordinator, at the club address or email: reps@africanbirdclub.org.

ABC is seeking Country Representatives in the following countries within the Club's region: Algeria, Ascension, Azores, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde Islands, Central African Republic, Chad, Comores & Mayotte, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Libya, Madeira, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Réunion, Rodriguez, Rwanda, São Tomé & Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Socotra, Somalia, St Helena, Sudan, Togo, Tristan da Cunha, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

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The Supporting Members scheme is a key part of the Club's strategy of encouraging the spread of knowledge and understanding of birds as widely as possible throughout Africa. The scheme enables Africans who would not otherwise have the resources to join, to become members of the Club. The scheme is funded by Supporting Members who pay a minimum of UK£25 to cover their own membership and the subscription of at least one African member. The money they contribute over and above their own subscription is placed in a special fund that is used to cover the membership expenses of African members whom they may have nominated, or who have been nominated by other Club members.

Although we have suggested a minimum of UK£25 to become a Supporting Member, any contribution is welcome. All members of the Club, even if they do not feel able to become Supporting Members themselves, are invited to nominate candidates for supported memberships. Candidates should be nationals of an African country, with a genuine interest in wild birds but without the resources to become members in their own right.

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The scheme now also includes Clubs who wish to be affiliated with the African Bird Club in African countries where it is difficult for local individuals to become members in their own right. Clubs accepted for membership under the scheme receive up to six copies of each issue of the bulletin for circulation among their members. Instead of paying a membership fee, Clubs are asked to provide a short annual report on their activities that may be published in the bulletin. Clubs interested in becoming Affiliated Member Clubs are invited to apply to the ABC Secretary giving details of their membership, their constitution or a statement of their objectives and conditions of their membership, and their activities to date.

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The Club does not guarantee to find all the answers but will try to help. The service is free to ABC members. Contact: Keith Betton, who is also custodian of ABC's journal library, at 8 Dukes Close, Folly Hill, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 0DR, UK. Tel: +44 1252 724068. Fax: +44 171 637 5626. E-mail: info@africanbirdclub.org.

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The Club also maintains a list of members e-mail addresses that are useful for informing members of upcoming events and news concerning the Club. We have addresses for approximately 33% of members. Please send additions or corrections to the secretary, at secretary@africanbirdclub.org. All addresses will be kept confidential and not used for commercial advertising etc.



Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus irenense*, Sokoke Forest, Kenya, August 2002 (Patricia Maldonado)